

Thurrock - An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future

## Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The meeting will be held at **7.00 pm** on **10 November 2020**

**Due to government guidance on social distancing and the COVID-19 virus, the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 November 2020 will be held virtually online. The press and public will be able to watch the meeting live online at the following link: [www.thurrock.gov.uk/webcast](http://www.thurrock.gov.uk/webcast)**

### Membership:

Councillors Oliver Gerrish (Chair), Jack Duffin (Vice-Chair), Colin Churchman, Garry Hague, Shane Ralph and Gerard Rice

### Substitutes:

Councillors Mike Fletcher, Sue Hooper, Sara Muldowney and Elizabeth Rigby

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### Agenda

Open to Public and Press

	<b>Page</b>
<b>1 Apologies for Absence</b>	
<b>2 Minutes</b>	<b>5 - 12</b>
To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 8 September 2020.	
<b>3 Items of Urgent Business</b>	
To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.	
<b>4 Declaration of Interests</b>	

<b>5</b>	<b>Community Forums</b>	<b>13 - 18</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Collaborative Communities Framework: 2021-2025</b>	<b>19 - 38</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Overview and Scrutiny at Thurrock: A Review</b>	<b>39 - 86</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Financial Update</b>	<b>87 - 98</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Connectivity and Wi-Fi Improvements</b>	<b>99 - 104</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Mid-Year/Quarter 2 (April-September 2020) Corporate Performance Report 2020/21</b>	<b>105 - 120</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Work Programme</b>	<b>121 - 124</b>

**Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:**

Please contact Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer by sending an email to [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)

Agenda published on: **2 November 2020**

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# DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Breaching those parts identified as a pecuniary interest is potentially a criminal offence

## Helpful Reminders for Members

- *Is your register of interests up to date?*
- *In particular have you declared to the Monitoring Officer all disclosable pecuniary interests?*
- *Have you checked the register to ensure that they have been recorded correctly?*

## When should you declare an interest at a meeting?

- **What matters are being discussed at the meeting?** (including Council, Cabinet, Committees, Subs, Joint Committees and Joint Subs); or
- If you are a Cabinet Member making decisions other than in Cabinet **what matter is before you for single member decision?**



Does the business to be transacted at the meeting

- relate to; or
- likely to affect

any of your registered interests and in particular any of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests?

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests shall include your interests or those of:

- your spouse or civil partner's
- a person you are living with as husband/ wife
- a person you are living with as if you were civil partners

where you are aware that this other person has the interest.

A detailed description of a disclosable pecuniary interest is included in the Members Code of Conduct at Chapter 7 of the Constitution. **Please seek advice from the Monitoring Officer about disclosable pecuniary interests.**

**What is a Non-Pecuniary interest?** – this is an interest which is not pecuniary (as defined) but is nonetheless so significant that a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard to be so significant that it would materially impact upon your judgement of the public interest.

## **Pecuniary**

If the interest is not already in the register you must (unless the interest has been agreed by the Monitoring Officer to be sensitive) disclose the existence and nature of the interest to the meeting

If the Interest is not entered in the register and is not the subject of a pending notification you must within 28 days notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest for inclusion in the register

**Unless you have received dispensation upon previous application from the Monitoring Officer, you must:**

- **Not participate or participate further in any discussion of the matter at a meeting;**
- **Not participate in any vote or further vote taken at the meeting; and**
- **leave the room while the item is being considered/voted upon**

**If you are a Cabinet Member you may make arrangements for the matter to be dealt with by a third person but take no further steps**

## **Non- pecuniary**

Declare the nature and extent of your interest including enough detail to allow a member of the public to understand its nature



**You may participate and vote in the usual way but you should seek advice on Predetermination and Bias from the Monitoring Officer.**

## Our Vision and Priorities for Thurrock

An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future.

1. **People** – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay
  - High quality, consistent and accessible public services which are right first time
  - Build on our partnerships with statutory, community, voluntary and faith groups to work together to improve health and wellbeing
  - Communities are empowered to make choices and be safer and stronger together
  
2. **Place** – a heritage-rich borough which is ambitious for its future
  - Roads, houses and public spaces that connect people and places
  - Clean environments that everyone has reason to take pride in
  - Fewer public buildings with better services
  
3. **Prosperity** – a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations
  - Attractive opportunities for businesses and investors to enhance the local economy
  - Vocational and academic education, skills and job opportunities for all
  - Commercial, entrepreneurial and connected public services

## Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8 September 2020 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors Oliver Gerrish (Chair), Jack Duffin (Vice-Chair) , Suzanne Hooper (*substitute*), Shane Ralph, and Elizabeth Rigby (*substitute*)

**Apologies:** Councillors Colin Churchman and Garry Hague

**In attendance:**  
Andrew Brittain, Strategic Lead Revenues and Benefits  
Sean Clark, Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property  
Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service  
Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer

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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded and live-streamed onto the Council's YouTube channel.

### **7. Minutes**

The minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9 June 2020 were approved as a true and correct record.

### **8. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **9. Declaration of Interests**

There were no interests declared.

### **10. Local Council Tax Scheme**

The Strategic Lead Revenues and Benefits introduced the report and stated that the report outlined the Local Council Tax Scheme (LCTS) including how pension-age people were protected under the scheme, and how the scheme considered those of working age. He stated that section 3 of the report outlined the current scheme, and section 4 outlined the proposed consultation, which would run until December and include an LCTS Summit in November. He stated that the results of the consultation would be analysed and brought before the Committee in January.

The Chair welcomed the report as he felt the LCTS needed a review and was

pleased this would be taken for public consultation. He also supported the proposal that the consultation results would be brought back before committee. He highlighted section 4 of the report and questioned if the consultation criteria could be expanded, for example if the criteria surrounding number of dependants in a household could be consulted on. The Strategic Lead Revenues and Benefits responded that the only restrictions on the scheme were the protections surrounding pension-age residents and other vulnerable groups, as well as ensuring that going to work pays, but every other aspect of the scheme could be consulted on.

Councillor Hooper asked how the LCTS Summit would be held, if restrictions remained in place regarding COVID-19. The Corporate Director Finance, Governance and Property replied that this has not been decided on yet, but could potentially be held remotely via Microsoft Teams. He mentioned that the Deputy Leader was keen to build on the success of the Fair Debt Summit, and added that he would be working with the communications team to ensure residents were aware of the consultation and could respond. Councillor Ralph expressed his concern over the format of the consultation during COVID, particularly as the most vulnerable residents might not be able to access online consultations, but could be most affected by the proposed changes. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service responded that they would work with voluntary sector groups across Thurrock and use their networks to make residents aware of the consultation, as well as signposting through the contact centre. Councillor Ralph asked if assistance could be provided for those with disabilities that wished to respond to the consultation. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service stated that the team could provide assistance on request, such as large-print hard copies of the consultation, and the contact centre would try to facilitate these arrangements. She added that assistance with consultations could also be provided in local libraries and hubs.

Councillor Rigby added that the wording and format of the consultation needed to be considered to ensure it was user-friendly. She stated that there was also a proposed adult social care consultation, and wanted to ensure that there was no confusion for residents between the two consultations. The Corporate Director Finance, Governance and Property answered that this would be considered before it was released, and that residents would have the maximum consultation time of 12 weeks to respond. The Director Strategy, Communications and Customer Services added that she would check if there was any overlap with the adult social care consultation, and if there was this would be clearly communicated to residents and the contact centre team would be made aware. Councillor Duffin queried the proposed £6000 capital savings limit for access to the LCTS, and asked if special measures could be put in place to ensure that those residents who had been made redundant due to COVID could still access the LCTS fund. The Strategic Lead Revenues and Benefits replied that at this stage the report only considered the proposed consultation, with an impact assessment and consultation responses due to come back before Committee in January.

The Chair summarised the Committee's comments into four key points:



1. The breadth of coverage of the consultation and ensuring that as many residents can access it as possible
2. The contents of the consultation, ensuring that it covers as many elements of the scheme as possible
3. Ensuring the consultation is as accessible as possible
4. Ensuring the consultation is clearly differentiated from others

**RESOLVED: That:**

**The Committee:**

- 1. Noted the analysis of the current scheme;**
- 2. Considered the elements proposed for public consultation;**
- 3. That the results of the consultation, recommended changes and impact analysis return to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny for consideration in January.**

**11. Financial Update**

The Corporate Director Finance, Governance and Property introduced the report and stated that this was an update from the report that was brought before Committee in July. He drew Members attention to 3.2-3.4 of the report which showed additional central government grant support, of which £0.5billion was not ring-fenced and was for general spending, and the rest ring-fenced for specific purposes. He highlighted point 3.6 of the report which outlined the general grant position, which was £9.2million in July and had increased to £10.757million since then. The Corporate Director Finance, Governance and Property outlined point 3.8 of the report which described £58.3million in business rate relief, and £23million as part of the discretionary grant scheme that had been directed out to businesses. He described section 4 of the report which summarised direct COVID pressures on the council, such as expenditure on food parcels during the height of lockdown and a reduction in income. He stated that these pressures equated to £12.9million, of which £10.7million could be offset with a central government grant, leading to a deficit of £2.2million as a result of direct COVID pressures. He stated that a Cabinet report had been published today which outlined other indirect pressures.

The Corporate Director Finance, Governance and Property described section 5 of the report which focussed on council tax, the hardship fund and LCTS. He stated that the collection of council tax was currently holding, but the finance team had seen an increase in the number of LCTS claimants. He added that although council tax was currently stable, the country had not yet seen the peak of economic downturn, so the Council were expecting more redundancies, which would lead to a reduction in council tax collections and a larger increase in LCTS claimants in 2021/22 and 2022/23. He added that the Council's collection of debt was currently decreased, and the longer people were in arrears, the more likely they were to default on payments. The Corporate Director Finance, Governance and Property outlined section 6 of

the report and stated that the figure of £15mn deficit next financial year had been revised since the report was published, and was currently £20mn deficit, with a further £7mn deficit in 2022/23. He stated that the Cabinet report updated Members on the financial outlook for this financial year and next, but did not focus on how to close the deficit. He added that a report on how to close the deficit would be brought before Corporate O&S in November, before going to Cabinet next year.

The Corporate Director Finance, Governance and Property commented on the Housing Revenue Account, which was still balanced due to other housing development income, but the finance team were watching overall rent collection closely, as resident's inability to pay rent due to COVID was not yet showing. He stated that the Capital Programme was currently being completely reviewed, including capacity and inflationary issues. He added that all non-essential spend and recruitment had been halted for this financial year. He summarised and stated that this report presented a sober financial outlook, particularly in comparison to previous reports which had been in surplus.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Director Finance, Governance and Property and his team for the report. He stated that it appeared the financial impact of COVID would be limited in this financial year with only a £2mn overspend, but the impact would increase in 2021/22. He asked if in-year savings this financial year would improve future budgets and deficits. The Corporate Director Finance, Governance and Property responded that the Council were trying to make current in-year savings, such as freezing non-essential recruitment. He added that there were no current plans for significant closures, but any closures would require a long lead-in time and extensive consultation. He stated that the overspend of £2mn in this financial year and part of the deficit in 2021/22 could be offset by reserve funds, but that the council would consider broader reserves, such as the capital reserves, and this would be included in a report for Corporate O&S in November. The Chair queried what proportion of deficit would stem from COVID, and what proportion would stem from lost income. The Corporate Director Finance, Governance and Property gave a general overview of where the deficit would come from, which included a reduction of council tax collection and business rate payment (although these would only be accounted for in the next financial year, and this deficit could be spread over three years according to central government); a reduction in business growth and house-building as part of the global slowdown; and increase in adult and children's social care pressures. He added that a review of housing delivery was also being undertaken, as there were currently no Thurrock Regeneration Limited (TRL) schemes being started, and this growth and development had been included in the budget before the pandemic. He added that there would also be no further substantial investments this financial year, and the programme had entered a temporary pause. He added that the Committee had requested increased democratic oversight of this function in January 2020, and the Deputy Leader was organising a meeting next week to discuss the framework for that. He commented that current investments were still sound and paying out, but no new investments were being considered. The Corporate Director Finance,

Governance and Property summarised and stated that the Council had also seen a reduction in income from fees and charges, such as car park charges and planning fees.

The Chair queried whether the predicted deficits in 2021/22 and 2022/23 could be reversed and growth could be achieved, or if they were definite. The Corporate Director Finance, Governance and Property responded that these deficits could be reversed but the Council would still be working from a lower base. Councillor Duffin asked how Thurrock's COVID financial outlook compared to other Councils across the country. The Corporate Director Finance, Governance and Property replied that Thurrock were doing better than some local authorities, as the reserves that had been built-up could be used to counter this financial year's deficit, and help towards next year's overspend. He stated that some local authorities were in the position of having to go back to Full Council with emergency budgets, but Thurrock did not have to do that as it started the financial year with a £4mn surplus, of which £2mn could be used to balance the budget this year, with £2mn still in reserve. He stated that although the Council were in a fairly good financial position there was still lots of pressures and uncertainty.

Councillor Hooper thanked the Corporate Director and his team for their hard work, and asked if the Council would receive any more funding from central government, particularly if there was a second wave. She also queried funding to tackle homelessness and rough-sleeping across the borough, as this had been a priority at the start of the pandemic. Councillor Ralph echoed Councillor Hooper's point that Thurrock had worked hard at the start of the pandemic to safeguard homeless people across the borough, and hoped to see this continue post-COVID. Councillor Ralph added that if there was a second wave of the pandemic, this could lead to more job losses and business closures, and queried whether the £20mn deficit figure could rise. The Corporate Director responded that tackling rough sleeping had been a very early objective for central government and Thurrock at the beginning of the pandemic, but did not know the precise detail of homelessness funding. He added that Thurrock were hoping for more money from central government, but nothing had been announced yet. He responded to Councillor Ralph's point that he hoped the £20mn deficit figure did not increase, but the team were currently looking at a number of scenarios. He stated that legally the Council have to balance the budget, but it was difficult to predict future financial trends, as schemes such as furlough were due to end soon, which could affect people financially. He thanked the Strategic Lead Revenues and Benefits for his hard work distributing government grants, as well as wider Council staff for their hard work during the pandemic.

Councillor Rigby questioned if there was a longer-term recovery plan in place. The Corporate Director Finance, Governance and Property replied that the financial situation was currently difficult to assess. He stated that Thurrock produced a five-year Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), but was only legally required to produce a three-year MTFS, and these included built-in growth assumptions from years two and three onwards, although this was now largely unknown. He added that there might be more central government

grants and new legislation that could improve the financial outlook and could change the financial recovery plans for Thurrock. He commented that the Council were still looking for growth in certain areas, such as the Local Plan as this would increase the number of people in Thurrock and reduce unemployment, which would help the Council's income.

The Chair summarised and stated that the next step in the financial process would be the September Cabinet report and November Corporate O&S report, which would provide high-level steering and an approach on how might be best to close the funding gap.

**RESOLVED: That:**

**1. The Committee commented on the assumptions and financial implications set out in the report.**

**12. Quarter 1 (April to June 2020) Corporate Performance Report 2020/21 and End of Year Corporate Performance Summary 2019/20**

The Director Strategy, Communications and Customer Services introduced the report and stated that this covered the first quarter of 2020/21 from April to June, which was during the height of national lockdown and the COVID pandemic. She stated that services had been impacted by the lockdown measures both directly and indirectly, and included some services stopping completely. She highlighted that 66% of key performance indicators (KPIs) still hit their targets, although this was down from 74% between April-June 2019 and the 2020/21 end of year figures. She drew Members attention to point 3.6 of the report which described which services had been impacted and commentary surrounding any mitigation. She outlined the current position as some services had now resumed, but some services would see a longer-term impact, which would continue to be monitored and mitigation sought. She summarised and stated that the report also contained the 2019/20 end of year summary, although the main focus was 2020/21 Quarter 1 and the COVID impact.

The Chair opened debate and thanked all Thurrock Council staff for their hard work in continuing to deliver services wherever possible during the pandemic, even during difficult circumstances and severe limitations. He stated that a large proportion of KPIs had been impacted by COVID and felt that no firm conclusions could be drawn from the data. He asked if there were any services whose missed target was not related to COVID. The Director Strategy, Communications and Customer Services replied that the team were focussing on KPIs which had been below target at end of year 2019/20, but potential mitigation to improve these services might not have happened because of the pandemic. She gave the example of waste collection as the Waste Management Working Group had achieved significant work that had not been implemented yet because of the pandemic. She stated that she hoped to see immediate improvement in some KPIs in quarter 2. The Chair highlighted page 41 of the agenda and asked if the proportion of household waste collected and recycled had increased during the lockdown, as more

people worked and stayed at home. Councillor Ralph, as a member of the Waste Management Group, replied that the proportion of waste had dramatically increased due to people working from home and doing more shopping, and waste collectors had described it as 'Christmas everyday'. He mentioned that before the lockdown waste collection trucks would complete one shift before needing to go to Bywaters to empty their trucks, but were now having to drive to Bywaters twice during a shift. Councillor Ralph thanked the waste collection staff for their hard work during this difficult period, in particular his local waste collector Paddy who had worked very hard and deserved recognition.

Councillor Duffin stated that even though there had been a pandemic, there was still numerous KPIs which had met their target, including the KPI regarding apprenticeships. He felt pleased to see that there were clear route to greens for KPIs which had not met their target. Councillor Hooper echoed Councillor Duffin's comments and added that because of COVID it was difficult to judge the KPIs this quarter. The Chair agreed and added that some KPIs such as street cleanliness would have improved due to the pandemic too. He summarised and stated that the Committee would continue to monitor the KPIs throughout the coming year to be able to accurately judge the longer-term impact that COVID may have had on some services.

**RESOLVED: That:**

**The Committee:**

- 1. Noted and commented upon the performance of the key corporate performance indicators, in particular those areas which are off target, and the impact of COVID-19;**
- 2. Identified any areas which require additional consideration;**
- 3. Noted the end of year outturns 2019/20.**

**13. Work Programme**

The Chair stated that a financial update report would be added to the Work Programme for November's meeting, to which the Committee agreed.

**The meeting finished at 8.10 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
Democratic Services at [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**

<b>10 November 2020</b>	<b>ITEM: 5</b>
<b>Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Community Forums</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> NA
<b>Report of:</b> Natalie Smith, Strategic Lead: Community Development and Equalities	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Les Billingham: Assistant Director, Adult Social Care and Community Development	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Roger Harris: Corporate Director, Adults, Housing and Health	
<b>This report is Public</b>	

## Executive Summary

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny have requested a report on Community Forums as part of their work plan. An invitation to Community Forum Chairs to attend the Scrutiny Committee meeting has been made to the Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary of Thurrock Association of Forums as the umbrella body for Forums. This report provides a summary background to Community Forums.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

**1.1 This report is provided as background information to Community Forums.**

### 2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Community Forums were encouraged by the council in the late 1990s as part of a neighbourhood management approach. They were encouraged to increase community engagement to shape council policy, as well as to encourage stronger partnerships at a local level. In essence Community Forums were encouraged to help stimulate a community response to local issues.

2.2 Initially, Community Forums were considered part of the council structure with a dotted line into the council via Area Assemblies. Individual Forums were clustered into four Area Assemblies, chaired by Councillors, with four Area Assemblies across the Borough – North, South, East and West. Area Assemblies ceased in 2004. At that time, Forums continued to receive an

annual budget of £200,000 across the borough to support community improvements identified through Forum meetings.

- 2.3 A set of best practice guidelines and templates was developed with forums in 2007 to help increase the diversity and representation of residents participating at meetings, as well as the general visibility of Forums across the borough. This provided an opportunity to ensure Forums had their own constitutions and were established as independent community associations. At the same time, a website was developed to support Forums, encouraging them to publish minutes and to use this medium to support a wider engagement base.

### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 3.1 **Current Community Forums:** Currently, 15 Community Forums are active in Thurrock in the following areas: Aveley & Kenningtons; Bulphan; Chadwell-St-Mary; Corringham, Fobbing & Homesteads; East and West Tilbury & Linford (Welcom); Horndon-on-the-Hill; Little Thurrock; Orsett; Purfleet-on-Thames; Stanford-le-Hope; South Ockendon & Belhus; Thameside; Tilbury; West Thurrock & South Stifford, and Orchards (south Grays around the Broadway).
- 3.2 Community Forums have previously operated in Chafford Hundred, Stifford Clays and Grays Town however, these have folded in recent years. There is some interest amongst residents to restart forums in Chafford Hundred and Grays Town, and work is ongoing to explore these opportunities.
- 3.2 **Meetings:** Ordinarily, Community Forums generally hold between 4 and 6 public meetings per year, including an Annual General Meeting to elect a steering committee and key roles such as Chair, Vice Chair and Treasurer. Physical public meetings have not been possible recently due to Covid but many Forums have explored new ways of engaging locally including e-newsletters and keeping in touch with member lists. There is increasing interest in hosting video meetings as it is clear the restriction of physical meetings may continue for some time.
- 3.3 **Attendance and engagement:** The numbers attending meetings can vary from area to area and depending on the agenda items. Most Forums have a regular set of people attending, but all aim to communicate with the wider community. Forums often succeed due to the dedication and commitment of a small number of volunteers. Many Forums struggle to encourage new committee members. There is an individual and collective commitment to increasing the diversity of those engaging with Community Forums and often local events prove to be more popular at attracting a broader profile of local areas than public meetings.
- 3.4 **Communication and engagement:** Community Forums have a dedicated website to share agendas and minutes as well as local news <http://www.thurrockcommunityforums.org.uk> Some Forums use social media.



All use local notice boards and are a valued resource for helping promote information across the borough about events, road closures, opportunities, consultations, workshops etc.

- 3.5 Partnership Working This varies across Forums. Police engagement is still strong in some areas but links with schools and GP practices is not fully embedded. Forums meet collectively through the Thurrock Association of Forums (TAF - an umbrella group for Forums). There is regular engagement through the council via the Community Development and Equalities team with TAF about ways in which the profile of Forums can be improved to attract an increase in the number and diversity of residents who engage with their local Forum. The council team supports individual Forums liaise with relevant departments as required to help resolve local issues.
- 3.6 Ward Councillors: Ward councillors are encouraged to attend and work alongside Community Forums. Ward members do not have voting rights on Forums, but Forums tend to work towards a local consensus rather than hold formal votes apart at AGMs.
- 3.7 Funding to Community Forums: Individual budgets for local improvements ceased in 2009. Thurrock Association of Forums negotiated to keep small administration budgets to cover costs such as room hire, promotion and volunteer expenses – this is currently £600 per active Forum per year. In addition it was agreed that council would continue to fund a blanket community insurance programme for Forums that can be used by local organisations for small events. It was also agreed to continue to fund the license for the website. Currently, the annual budget to support Community Forums is £15,810. As independent community associations, many seek external funding to help improve local conditions or to make things happen that benefit neighbourhoods.
- 3.8 Local outcomes: Often, the strength of the Community Forum is best demonstrated in the difference they can make locally by bringing people together around issues of local concern. Some examples of the outcomes Forums have contributed to include:
- Building local pride by celebrating local heritage through events and installations
  - Building community cohesion through hosting events from summer fetes to sports days and Christmas celebrations.
  - Environmental improvements, for example, regular litter picks and taking action against fly tipping
  - Raising awareness of local issues and helping to find the best solutions for all
  - Helping people to feel a sense of belonging and connected to where they live.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

4.1 This report is provided for information only.

## 5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 NA.

## 6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 Community Forums contribute to the priority: **people** – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay.

## 7. Implications

### 7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Rosie Hurst**  
**Interim Senior Management Accountant**

The annual financial contribution made by council to the cost of supporting community forums is covered at 3.7

### 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**  
**Deputy Head of Law and Deputy Monitoring Officer**

Since the purpose of this report is to provide background information to this Committee, there are no direct legal implications as such. As paragraph 3.6 of this report explains, Ward councillors are encouraged to attend Community Forum meetings and work alongside Community Forums. As such, if they attend Community Forum meetings, they have a role to play at them, but they would attend in a non-voting capacity only.

### 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**  
**Team Manager, Community Development and Equalities Team**

Community Forums support a sense of belonging within neighbourhoods. Forums have adopted equal opportunity policies and aim to attract a diverse range of residents at public meetings, events and onto committees.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

NA.

**8. Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- NA

**9. Appendices to the report**

- NA

**Report Author:**

Natalie Smith

Strategic Lead: Community Development and Equalities

Adult Social Care and Community Development, AHH

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<b>10 November 2020</b>	<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Collaborative Communities Framework 2021-2025</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Key
<b>Report of:</b> Natalie Smith, Strategic Lead Community Development and Equalities	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Les Billingham, Assistant Director Adult Social Care and Community Development	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Roger Harris, Corporate Director, Adults, Housing and Health	
<b>This report is Public</b>	

## Executive Summary

This paper sets out proposals to embed a pan council approach to how we work with communities. The council is committed to supporting communities and encouraging residents to drive and contribute to local improvements and has recently agreed a new priority project to consider community level transformation. The Collaborative Communities framework covers three key distinct areas – Engagement, Equalities and Empowerment. All three areas are interdependent and gain strength and momentum by coming together into one Framework to support a pan council approach to collaboration.

Under the umbrella term “Collaborative Communities”, the scope includes co-design and influencing decisions as well as working together to address societal challenges. The Framework includes our Corporate Equality Objectives.

The vision for the Collaborative Communities (CC) Framework is:

‘We are committed to creating a fair, accessible and inclusive borough where everyone has a voice and an equal opportunity to succeed and thrive, and where community led ambitions are supported and actively encouraged’.

The principles of the CC framework can be summarised as:

- A) Engagement – Involving residents in the decisions that affect their lives, using co-design and co-production methods to address the issues facing residents, as well as the solutions.
- B) Empowerment - Supporting resilience within communities and voluntary sector networks through asset based community development, supporting

communities to champion change. The council aims to enable communities to make a difference and to flourish.

- C) Equality - Ensuring services are free of prejudice and that council services enable all to have equal opportunities to prosper and contribute to building a diverse and inclusive borough.

Achieving the ambition of the CC Framework will require all council services to consider how they can enable communities to achieve local ambitions including devolving power, reducing bureaucracy and enabling different ways of working. Our ambition is to reduce the red tape that communities often experience when taking community led action so they are more enabled to achieve local outcomes.

The Framework is intended to support new ways of working within existing resources. Given the financial climate facing councils and communities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, implementation will be phased with individual projects identified with both services and communities over the next four years 2021 – 2025. Any financial impact of new proposals will be considered as they are developed, However the ambition is to redirect resources to help ensure the values of this Framework are embedded across all council services.

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee is invited to comment and contribute to the CC Framework. Views are particularly welcome on the idea of a 'pact' or 'bond' with communities, as well as broader comment on the proposed actions and their priority.

## 1. Recommendation(s)

**Comments are invited to support the scope of the Framework – specifically the idea of a 'pact' or 'bond' with communities, as well as broader comment on the proposed actions and their priority.**

## 2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This report and Framework builds on the successful transformation experience of Adult Social Care to working differently with communities. In order to effectively manage increasing demands, innovative approaches have been developed and implemented to address how health and social care is redesigned in Thurrock. Fundamental to the programme has been a commitment to a shift in thinking from a deficit model (a focus on 'what is wrong?') which creates dependency, to a strength based model (a focus on 'what is strong') which can open opportunities for collaboration, placing the citizen at the centre of opportunity for change. This transformational programme has included testing new ways of working including Local Area Co-ordinators, Thurrock First, community led support in Tilbury and Chadwell St Mary and challenging funding-silos to create new opportunities. It builds on the principles of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). Evaluation of projects to date demonstrate the added value and investment potential that

can be realised by diverting funds into prevention rather than costly, statutory services.

- 2.2 Using ABCD effectively can help to change our relationship with communities, encouraging a less paternalistic approach to work and helping to empower community led solutions that are often better for communities and more sustainable than public sector organisations providing a local service.
- 2.3 Many services across the council are already committed to working differently with residents to enable community led action, and to collaborate on ideas for improvements posed by residents. The CC Framework looks to embed collaboration as a key value across all services and future strategies. It highlights certain actions that will help us to be a strong partner alongside communities, working for shared aspirations.
- 2.4 A draft approach was shared with Corporate Overview and Scrutiny in September 2019. This was well received and subsequent engagement with key stakeholders has helped to shape the CC Framework. This is an evolving piece of work which will develop with learning and experience. A key event that helped to shape the Framework was a joint conference with CVS in October 2019, attended by over 150 people. Internal meetings with services have developed further thinking about the Framework and its ambition.
- 2.5 Development of the Framework was delayed in March 2020 with the need to prioritise our response to COVID-19. The strong partnership and relationships already in place and the ability to trust and collaborate across sectors allowed Thurrock Council and Thurrock Community and Voluntary Services (CVS) to quickly and successfully establish a highly effective community response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Thurrock Coronavirus Community Action (TCCA). TCCA has ensured that thousands of residents in Thurrock are getting the help and support they need, and this help continues for those without friends and family who need to self-isolate. Our experience of mobilising as we did to respond to COVID-19 is a practical example of all we aim to achieve through this Framework into our day to day encounters with communities.

### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 3.1 Community engagement is an essential component of any policy development and underpins all council work. Good community engagement tends to increase how positively people feel about where they live as a place and whether they are valued as active citizens. All services are required to demonstrate they have considered, and where necessary, consulted upon the impact of changes before taking decisions. This Framework seeks to explore and use digital engagement opportunities as well to support co-design and co-production, exploring ideas and solutions through inclusive dialogue.
- 3.2 The term 'citizen' demonstrates the commitment to ensuring council processes and procedures work to enable communities to achieve their ambitions to improve quality of life. Often, council processes can create

unintended barriers that prevent, or deter, communities from taking control of parts of their lives or social issues where the state, or council, should have a limited role. The inclusion of empowerment in this Framework seeks to drive change so that we can reduce red tape and enable more collaborative processes that support communities achieve the change they seek.

- 3.3 The Framework includes the council's Equality and Diversity Statement and four corporate equality objectives. By including the objectives within this Framework, we are able to recognise the interconnection of community engagement and empowerment while setting out our ambition to create a fair, accessible and inclusive borough where everyone has a voice and an equal opportunity to succeed and thrive.
- 3.4 The four corporate equality objectives seek to address the issues where dialogue around equality has focused most consistently across numerous consultation and engagement outcomes and surveys to understand the needs of those with protected characteristics. They are:
- Access to services
  - Supporting community integration and cohesion
  - Improving resilience
  - Workforce development

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 Community engagement is an essential component of any policy development and underpins all council work. At a time of financial pressures, effective engagement helps to make the best use of our widest range of resources, supporting decisions that are sustainable and build on community resource.

#### **5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 5.1 This Framework has developed following a number of meetings and conversations with key stakeholders including Thurrock Community Forums, and Thurrock CVS and the Voluntary Sector.

#### **6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

- 6.1 The proposal to review our approach to engagement reflects the council's vision 'An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future'. The Framework supports the delivery of the corporate priority project of Community Level Transformation – designing out demand, redefining role of council and achieving better outcomes for our residents and local communities through collaboration and co-design.

#### **7. Implications**



## 7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**  
**Strategic Lead: Corporate Finance**

Whilst there are no direct financial implications arising from this report, implementation of the proposed Framework may generate financial implications. These will be considered as the Framework and implementation plan is developed alongside options for using existing resources more efficiently to meet any new costs.

## 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**  
**Deputy Head of Law and Deputy Monitoring Officer**

Whilst there aren't any specific legal issues raised in this report, the proposed Framework, amongst other things, addresses the legal requirements and principles in relation to consultation and engagement including the (common law) doctrine of legitimate expectation and Gunning Principles (1985). Certain functions of the Council, including planning, have statutory requirements to consult. Failure to consult or inadequate consultation could leave the Council in breach of its legal requirements and open to challenge through a judicial review application.

Other specific legislation, including the Local Government Acts (including the 1972, 1999 and 2000 Acts), the Localism Act 2011 and the Equality Act (2010) must or can be taken into account when appropriate and relevant. The Framework sets out the council's corporate equality objectives for the next four years.

The proposed strategy will be reviewed every four years or sooner to comply with changes to the law or policy and practice or as otherwise required.

## 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**  
**Team Manager, Community Development and Equalities**

In recent years, the council's approach to engaging and empowering local communities to design and deliver community-led solutions has evolved significantly with the introduction of Asset Based Community Development. This practice has been successful in a number of areas although only through close joint working with the voluntary, community and faith sector to enable

and facilitate the involvement and participation of residents and specifically protected groups who may also be users or beneficiaries of the sector.

The proposal for a 'Collaborative Communities Framework' will consolidate learning and best practice associated with consultation and engagement including those associated with ABCD and Your Place Your Voice.

A community equality impact assessment (CEIA) will be completed for this Framework which sets out the council's equality objectives for the next four years. This CEIA will not however alleviate the responsibility of individual services to understand and respond to the specific needs of communities and individuals with protected characteristics by actively seeking them at the outset of designing and then implementing policies, programmes and services at a borough and neighbourhood level.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

The proposed Framework will seek to refresh Thurrock's Joint Compact between the statutory sector and the council. The current compact can be viewed here <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/strategies/thurrock-joint-compact>

9. **Appendices to the report**

Draft Collaborative Communities Framework 2021 - 2025

**Report Author:**

Natalie Smith

Strategic Lead: Community Development and Equalities

Adult Social Care and Community Development

**‘Alone, we can do so little; together we can do so much’ Helen Keller****Overview**

Thurrock is distinctive in so many ways. Undiscoverable on a road map – but within its numerous towns and villages is a wealth of local history, community assets and resident networks galvanised by the pride they hold for their area. Place is therefore of huge significance to Thurrock, as is the commitment to supporting People to lead the way in making the borough a great place to live while having the power to influence issues that affect them the most. As a council we often hold the resource and responsibility to make a huge difference to our communities, working towards Prosperity for all. But doing this well, ensuring that all we do enables our residents to thrive, requires a different relationship with residents as citizens.

The aims of this framework reflect the issues that have evolved in consultation with a wide range of residents, voluntary and public sector organisations active in Thurrock. Setting out our ambition will help to further develop new ideas, and new relationships, for the future.

Progress on developing this framework has been delayed due to the unprecedented need to respond to COVID-19. Since March 2020, our plans for co-producing the framework were replaced with developing and mobilising Thurrock Coronavirus Community Action (TCCA), providing support to people self-isolating or shielding at home. The speed by which we were able to implement an effective response with the voluntary sector evidences the commitment that exists across the borough to collaborate in order to achieve the best local solutions for local residents. Thurrock’s voluntary, community and faith sector supported communities through lockdown, either through TCCA or with their immediate community. Nationally the sector has suffered disproportionately from the economic impact of COVID-19. In Thurrock, we recognise the value of a strong voluntary sector and will be working closely with our partners through the development of a Recovery, Resilience and Return to Growth Strategy for Thurrock, as well as supporting sustainability through the implementation of this framework.

**Vision of the Collaborative Communities Framework 2021 - 2025:**

Core to the success of this framework is a commitment from the council to achieve an organisational shift to the culture of how we work and enable communities to co-design and influence decisions, address challenges and realise ambitions.

Our vision for this framework is:

‘We are committed to creating a fair, accessible and inclusive borough where everyone has a voice and an equal opportunity to succeed and thrive, and where community led ambitions are supported and actively encouraged.’

Working towards this vision will require aligning our policy and practice accordingly by reducing the red tape that hinders community led action, devolving power and enabling different ways of working so communities are better enabled to achieve local outcomes.

The business case for the council to lead change at this time is clear. Co-design and co-production not only makes the best of our widest range of resources, but it leads to decisions that are sustainable and work for communities. Prevention in itself saves money. Embedding a commitment to social value, and commissioning with economic, social and environmental outcomes in mind, favours local spend. Exploring joint budgets for shared outcomes helps to break silos and enables integration – in short, better outcomes for local people.

## Our priorities

To achieve the vision set out in this framework, our priorities are set out within three key themes:

### Engagement:

Involving residents in the decisions that affect their lives, using co-design and co-production methods in the issues facing residents, as well as the solutions.

### Empowerment:

Supporting resilience within communities and voluntary sector networks through asset based community development, supporting communities to champion change. The council aims to enable communities to make a difference and to flourish.

### Equality:

Ensuring services are free of prejudice and that council services enable all to have equal opportunities to prosper and contribute to building a diverse and inclusive borough.

Our equality objectives are:

- Access to Services
- Supporting Community Integration and Cohesion
- Improving Resilience
- Workforce Development

Our approach depends on place based, co-design and co-production. This recognises the resources that citizens already have and the benefits of delivering services **with** rather than for people. It is an equal and reciprocal relationship between citizens and agencies with an inherent respect between all parties based on the skills, knowledge, experience and creativity they each bring forward.

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) has already informed much of the transformation in the council's Adult Social Care Team and is a principle we will carry over into our everyday engagement with residents and communities. All council services will consider how they can embed ABCD to improve and inform their approach to service planning and delivery. This requires a commitment to a shift in thinking from a deficit model (a focus on 'what is wrong?') which creates dependency - to a strength based model (a focus on 'what is strong').

Enabling people from different backgrounds to come together to share their ideas and channel how they feel about life in Thurrock builds strong, cohesive communities. We will work together with a diverse network of residents and community organisations to drive forward our commitments to achieve equality, diversity and inclusion implementing a strengths-based approach.

### Delivering our priorities

The following section sets out how we will work collaboratively to deliver our priorities in alignment with the three themes (Engagement, Empowerment, Equality).

## Engagement

Involving residents in the decisions that affect their lives, using co-design and co-production methods in the issues facing residents, as well as the solutions

We will:

- Explore an integrated approach to develop place based engagement, building synergy with primary care networks, community forums and area focused engagement such as Your Place your Voice to develop the Local Plan.
- Develop our use of the Consultation Portal alongside inclusive dialogue with communities when formal consultation is required, building on what is known from previous conversations. This will improve decision making and the impact for those affected. Participatory Budgeting is an example of where the Portal can improve how local budgets are spent by services, ensuring communities influence decisions.
- Build on existing partnerships to maximise the opportunity for collaboration. We will work with the Stronger Together Partnership to promote opportunities for engagement, recognising that dialogue with partners engenders trust and collaboration, placing the citizens at the centre of opportunity for change.

Recent achievements:

- Dialogue arising from Black Lives Matters and initiation of a new BAME community forum, facilitated by Thurrock CVS.
- Work to support Friends of Parks groups who play a key role in creating safe spaces for recreation and connecting communities.
- Joint conference held in October 2019 with Thurrock CVS to explore how we improve working together to build stronger communities: *'A fantastic event showcasing Thurrock as a community and how we all have a part to play to ensure we continue to keep Thurrock great'* – participant quote.

## Transformation and Organisational Change:

Around 62% of Thurrock Council staff live in the borough. We will build on this to embed the commitments in this framework, and encourage staff to support community priorities through service planning and delivery.

We will:

- Implement a learning and development plan underpinned by the enablement of cultural change supporting services to review how they operate to deliver this agenda.
- Support elected members to play an effective community leadership role, helping to ensure that varying local needs and aspirations are considered and understood within the context of council policies.
- Review our policy framework to embed our commitments and to challenge unnecessary bureaucracy, empowering staff to support communities to make quick progress when there is a shared ambition to deliver.

Recent achievements:

- Staff and councillors played a key role in supporting communities through TCCA with a variety of roles including collecting prescriptions, shopping and delivering essential food parcels.
- Staff networks have led on a number of events and initiatives to champion equalities across our workforce, the most recent examples include International Women's Day and flying the Rainbow Flag to mark Essex Pride recognising and supporting LGBT+ staff and residents.
- We have recruited change leads across the council to work with Directorate Workforce Groups to support new ways of working and to help embed the cultural change that underpins success.

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## **Empowerment**

Supporting resilience within communities and voluntary sector networks through asset based community development, supporting communities to champion change. The council aims to enable communities to make a difference and to flourish

## **Resourcing Social Action**

We value the impact of community assets and associations to Thurrock and recognise the need to target investment to achieve the greatest social value.

We will:

- Complete a review of our Social Value Framework and increase the opportunity for maximising social, economic and environmental outcomes from how we spend all local budgets by exploring new ways of working such as Place Based Commissioning.
- Take an asset based approach to resources by celebrating what we have available at our disposal as a borough. We will ensure value for money, local investment and the best use of resources to support sustainability by exploring new ways of working such as Place Based Commissioning.
- Explore new ways of using resources fairly across partners, repurposing where appropriate and valuing the collective resources we share. This will be supported by mapping how and where money is spent, and considering the opportunity of our buildings, knowledge, time, skills, commitment and data.
- Maximise local investment through collaboration, and recognise the need to support communities to engage fairly by having adequate time and capacity to participate. We will seek to reward and recognise active citizens supporting the development of our Borough.

## **Supporting a sustainable Third Sector**

Voluntary sector organisations evolve as people come together and choose to make a difference to their community, be it area-based or a community of interest. Many charities and voluntary organisations perform essential work that contributes to the fabric of our society. Often, they act as a vital referral resource for public services. COVID-19 has severely impacted the third sector. Losing their services in either the short term or after the country emerges from the crisis will cause untold damage to individuals and communities. Now, more than ever, it is imperative that we support a sustainable third sector in Thurrock.

We will:

- Ensure officers understand what is meant by the voluntary sector, how to engage effectively, ensuring timely communications. This will include championing the voluntary sector, ensuring understanding of the independence of charities, and respecting as equal to enable fair and effective partnership working.
- Review council processes relevant to communities who want to lead improvements so that the voluntary sector can actively influence outcomes. This will include a review of processes related to permissions, funding, procurement, monitoring and funding protocols so we enable sustainability and are proportionate in the bureaucracy required.
- Recognise and actively encourage organisations to strive to be sustainable where possible, and to be able to plan for their delivery. Organisations need capacity to operate and infrastructure support to be effective, including volunteer recruitment and management. We

will seek to embed this commitment into processes relating to joint work with the sector, for example, funding agreements.

- Strive to ensure Thurrock gets its fair share of external funding. We will support the development of community fundraising through Giving for Thurrock (GiFT) as a place-based focus to invest in social action, and continue to promote Small Sparks as a quick and easy way to support community ideas that make a difference.

#### Recent achievements:

- The development of an action plan in response to a Fair Debt Summit held with partners from the voluntary sector. Key aspects include investment in new technology and education of our younger generations.
- In the last year, housing contractors resourced at least 50% of their teams from local residents and were purchasing at least 60% of their supplies locally.
- Key Performance Indicators within contracts were relaxed in response to COVID-19, and we will uphold the principle of at least three months' notice prior to any changes to contract terms and conditions impacting on the sector.
- The repurposing of the Voluntary Sector Development Fund and Community Environmental Development Fund to support the sustainability and resilience of community organisations through COVID 19.



## **Equality**

Ensuring services are free of prejudice and that council services enable all to have equal opportunities to prosper and contribute to building a diverse and inclusive borough

### **Our equality statement**

We believe that the diversity of Thurrock's communities is a positive asset, reflecting our motto 'By Thames to all people of the world'.

The people who live, work and visit Thurrock come from diverse backgrounds and circumstances. However, the disadvantage and discrimination that some communities experience has a negative effect on the quality of their lives.

Thurrock Council is committed to providing equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination, harassment, intimidation and disadvantage. We are also committed to promoting good relations.

We want Thurrock to be a place where all citizens feel they are listened to and have a stake in the community, and which supports and values individual and community initiatives that bring people together.

As a community leader we will work together with our partners to ensure that everybody has the opportunity to fulfil their potential, and that our neighbourhoods are places where people come together to prosper.

Our four equality objectives provide a focus and overview of how the council will work towards making our borough fairer and more equitable for all.

### **Our equality objectives**

Our equality statement underpins the Collaborative Communities framework and sets out our commitment to working to eliminate unlawful discrimination and unconscious bias, promoting access, fairness and equality in the employment and training of employees and in the delivery of our services. One of the ways we deliver this is by ensuring that equality is a key consideration during the formulation and development of our policies and functions. This is demonstrated through the completion of a Community Equality Impact Assessment process that takes consideration of the impact of council policy and practice for protected groups, in line with the Equality Act 2010.

The Equality Act 2010 has extended the protection of individuals to nine different groups, these are referred to as protected characteristics.

### **The protected characteristics are as follows:**

- Age
- Sex
- Disability
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sexual Orientation
- Gender Re-assignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity

We go beyond the protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act 2010 to include socio-economic status, as we recognise there are disparities across our communities. Our Community Equality Impact Assessment (CEIA) process therefore takes consideration of both deprivation and protected characteristics.

We are currently working together with our workforce, partners and the community to drive growth in our role as champions for equality, diversity, inclusion and cohesion in Thurrock and have identified four equality objectives that will underpin the delivery of this framework. The following section highlights those objectives including our plans to deliver them.

### **Access to services**

We are committed to ensuring that all council services are accessible and free from prejudice and discrimination.

We will:

- Improve the use of the data and intelligence we collect and hold concerning the diversity profile and experience of Thurrock residents using our services. We will use this information to address the differences in outcomes and opportunities experienced by different people in key areas of life such as health, education, community safety and housing to improve equality outcomes. Whilst doing so we will, as a matter of course, also respect individual rights to protection over the dissemination and appropriate use of their data, as expressed in the General Data Protection Regulations legislation.
- We will continue to undertake comprehensive CEIAs to understand which communities may experience negative consequences from our proposals, and involve them in agreeing how to mitigate issues adequately. Improving access to services, information, treatments and support interventions helps to reduce inequalities.
- Learn from new ways of remaining connected whilst observing social distancing to control the spread of COVID-19, and work with our partners to reduce the digital divide, maximising resident's skills, confidence and access to technology.

### **Supporting community integration and cohesion**

Communities may define themselves by neighbourhood, ethnicity or culture, age, faith, sexual orientation, sex or other characteristics or by common interests. Community integration and cohesion describes the ability of all communities to function and grow in harmony together rather than in conflict. Thurrock Council welcomes and celebrates the diversity of everyone living, working and visiting our borough.

We will:

- Work with the Thurrock Community Safety Partnership to tackle hate crime and prevent extremism. We will work with communities to prevent hate incidents and crimes, and encourage reporting. We will improve the quality and transparency of communications in relation to the Prevent agenda to raise public awareness of and exposure to Prevent.
- Working with partners, including schools, prepare an annual calendar of commemorative and celebration events. These will mark key dates and provide an opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, and pursue education, conversation and discussion to tackle perceptions of discrimination
- Promote opportunities for shared experience and connecting communities using a strengths-based approach in all we do for new and established communities. Social interaction and meaningful contact between different communities builds cohesion. We aim to support face to face engagement, dialogue and outreach within guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- Provide support to community and workforce focus groups that identify key issues and barriers to equality, inclusion and cohesion in Thurrock.

### **Improving resilience**

At a time of great economic instability as a consequence of COVID-19, it is imperative that we understand the impact it has placed on different communities in Thurrock and projected outcomes. Pooled data and intelligence derived from our work with partners and comprehensive Community Equality Impact Assessments will be continually reviewed to ensure that we are able to determine what COVID-19 means for different communities in Thurrock.

We will:

- Develop targeted interventions to enable joined up prevention measures that respond where there is evidence of the need to do so
- Develop communities of practice to ensure timely information and communication regarding support programmes and emerging needs and aspirations are understood and supported.
- Gather data and intelligence in consultation with residents and partners to gain a collective understanding and develop means to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and what this means for different communities in Thurrock. We will focus on maximising potential job creation and supporting people into employment through the delivery of our Economic Growth Strategy.
- Adopt a preventative strength based approach to available support and getting behind community led approaches to build resilience.

### **Workforce development**

Equality of opportunity is fundamental to maximising the engagement and performance of our people and we strive to create a positive environment through education and awareness raising of equality and diversity both within the organisation and the wider borough. The People Strategy 2020/23 sets our ambition for our workforce based on six key values: Proud, Ambitious, Compassionate, Inclusive, Empowered, Collaborative.

We will:

- Live the standards and values we set out in our People Strategy providing a customer first approach.
- Deliver a comprehensive workforce development plan for equality, diversity and inclusion putting in place plans to achieve the capacity and skills to deliver what is required to support all of our communities and harness the diversity of our working environments.
- Create a trusted and inclusive environment where our staff are confident to disclose protected characteristics.
- Use data and intelligence provided by our workforce to develop plans that address barriers to equality, diversity and inclusion, strive towards employing a workforce that is representative of the borough's demographic profile and publish an Annual Workforce Equality Report that highlights our progress.

Recent achievements:

- A Hate Crime Ambassador Programme has been established alongside Hate Incident Reporting Centres (HIRCS) in Thurrock.
- 7 active staff networks are now in place, creating links with community networks.
- We challenged Highways England to carry out a Health Equality Impact Assessment on the Lower Thames Crossing proposal.
- We listened to the needs of Thurrock's Muslim community and worked with community leaders to identify a suitable piece of land to enable future burials.
- In January 2020 Council adopted the definition of antisemitism as set out by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

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## **Next steps**

### **A Pact for Thurrock**

The Collaborative Communities Framework seeks to influence the ways we work for the benefit of communities. In taking this approach we recognise that different organisations will have varying degrees of resource, influence and power at their disposal, creating an unequal base for starting a new conversation to assist change.

Services can achieve so much more through collaboration rather than working in silos. Our experience of working together to support communities through COVID-19 has demonstrated the level of trust that already exists between Thurrock Council and the voluntary sector.

We recognise the vision and priorities set out in this framework are dynamic and will evolve with expanded engagement and experience.

Success is dependent on a collective agreement to deliver the priorities set out in this framework by all of our partners. Embedding these priorities into policy and action will help transform our borough so that delivery is informed by, and co-produced with local communities.

We will refresh the Thurrock Joint Compact as a Pact for Thurrock, and develop these principles so they are fit for purpose in these unprecedented times. Please see Annex 1 - 'Principles informing the development of a pact for Thurrock'.

## **Conclusion**

The vision, principles and aims of this framework highlight the overarching plans for building on the foundations of strength based working to create better outcomes for local communities.

An implementation plan will be developed alongside this framework establishing the role of the council and its partners to ensure the most efficient, high impact delivery of the vision and priorities that have been outlined.

## Annex 1 - Principles informing the development of a Pact for Thurrock

Success is dependent on a collective agreement to deliver the priorities set out in this framework by all of our partners. Embedding these priorities into policy and action will help transform our borough so that delivery is informed by, and co-produced with local communities. We will refresh the Thurrock Joint Compact as a Pact for Thurrock, and develop these principles so they are fit for purpose in these unprecedented times,

Through the development of a Pact for Thurrock, we will:

- **Be outcome focused** – by agreeing a coherent and shared vision of the difference we intend to make, each organisation can use its strengths and resources more effectively to achieve a collective impact.
- **Create trust based partnership arrangements** – working within existing relationships, creating agile and reactive solutions without the need for unnecessary time consuming governance and bureaucracy. The local system is able to respond as one, not as a series of independent entities inhibited by organisational structures. We need to capture and value this approach into protocols for the future.
- **Provide strong, consistent leadership enabling distributed leadership** – empowerment and proactive leadership is needed to foster the confidence of staff teams and communities to take responsibility and to use innovative and creative capacities to find solutions, free from risk of feeling unsupported.
- **Implement asset based and strength based approaches** – the concept of doing with rather than to sits at the heart of every aspect of our change journey. This has enabled communities to take action rather than having a service type solution imposed on them. The TCCA response which mobilised volunteers to help those self-isolating and shielding in our communities quickly and effectively, is a strong example of the asset based approach in action.
- **Value the importance of technology** – the scale of the coronavirus revealed the importance of technology. It also highlighted the challenges faced by many in gaining access to equipment and Wi-Fi, as well as having the skills and confidence to use technology.
- **Value the importance of human connections** – loneliness is a blight on society that risks increasing as lockdown restrictions ease, leaving some unable to enjoy their previous networks and excluded from new opportunities. Community networks play a fundamental role in combating loneliness and enabling community connections (e.g. through neighbourhoods, faith groups, clubs and societies). Shared experience breeds cohesion and we will value the assets in our Borough that contribute to the quality of life of so many through their networks.
- **Use evidence and local intelligence** – the use of data and evidence based practice, coupled with local intelligence and the passion of communities will help to create a shared objective and the effective use of resources.
- **Provide a focus on prevention** – experience within adult social care transformation to move the system away from a clinical treatment model and toward a population health approach with greater emphasis on treatment of the causal nature of poor health and well-being outcomes, can be expanded to all areas of public life. Street cleaning, anti-social behaviour and tackling obesity are just some examples.

- **Value the importance of place** - the importance of locality working cannot be underestimated in terms of building pride, enhancing identity and galvanising community passion to drive local improvements. Whilst some things need to be done at scale, the organising principle driving local transformation is that of subsidiarity; that the centre should only be responsible for those things that cannot be delivered at a more local level. Neighbourhoods enjoy strong networks, able to respond with agility and pace to issues as they emerge. We need to value and nurture locality based partnerships that can help bring capacity and focus to local issues, ensuring there is an equality of engagement, building consensus where difference exists.
- **Propose means to achieve a rebalancing of power** – away from officials and organisations and towards citizens and communities.

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<b>10 November 2020</b>	<b>ITEM: 7</b>
<b>Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Overview and Scrutiny at Thurrock: A Review</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Key
<b>Report of:</b> Matthew Boulter, Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Ian Hunt, Assistant Director Law and Governance, and Monitoring Officer	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sean Clark, Corporate Director Finance, Governance and Property	
<b>This report is public</b>	

## Executive Summary

This report details the Task and Finish Review that was undertaken in order to focus on overview and scrutiny, and the motions process at Thurrock Council. The outcome of the review is to ensure scrutiny works for all Members, and the function meets national guidelines and frameworks.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That the Committee approve the recommendations as set out in Appendix 1, and agree to send to Cabinet for appropriate approval.**
- 1.2 That the Committee approve the draft Executive-Scrutiny Protocol, as attached at Appendix 1 of the Review.**

### 2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This review began due to a number of factors, including Members wish to have a detailed look into the process, and a motion raised at October 2018 Full Council by Councillor Spillman who questioned the effectiveness of motions, and the overview and scrutiny process across Thurrock.
- 2.2 Members undertook a number of meetings and events, as well as detailed research to look into the current state of scrutiny at Thurrock and how the function currently works well, and what areas could be improved by the work of the review.

2.3 The Committee's findings are attached at Appendix 1 of this report.

### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

3.1 The issues and options relating to the report are contained at Appendix 1 of this report.

3.2 Members are asked to be mindful of the meaningful balance required to deliver an effective scrutiny function alongside the resources available to support its work and aspirations. The recommendations in the review represent a refocus of current resources rather than a call for additional financial support or officer resource.

### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

4.1 This report, if agreed by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee will progress to Cabinet in order they may note the important findings of the Review but also to approve any recommendations relating to them, most notably the Executive-Scrutiny Protocol.

4.2 The recommendations will allow for scrutiny committees and the Executive to have an enhanced working relationship and to improve practices in the scrutiny function in line with evidenced findings led by Members.

### **5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

5.1 Members of overview and scrutiny committees and the Executive, have been consulted on the findings laid out in this report, through the comments made at the scrutiny symposium and the Executive-Scrutiny Workshop.

5.2 This report has also gone through internal processes such as Directors Board, and governance procedures.

### **6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

6.1 Delivery of successful, high-quality governance has a significant impact on all of Thurrock Council's priorities. Specifically, on including the community in governance procedures such as Committee meetings and asking questions of Members.

### **7. Implications**

#### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Dammy Adewole**  
**Senior Management Accountant**

There are no financial implications attached to this report.

## 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Courage Emovon**  
**AG Strategic Lead, Deputy Head of Legal Services, and Deputy Monitoring Officer**

This report ensures that Thurrock Council meets the Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local Combined Authorities, published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in May 2019. It also ensures that the Council is meeting its overview and scrutiny function as provided by the Local Government Act 2000, and the Localism Act 2011.

## 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**  
**Community Development Team Manager**

This report helps Thurrock Council meet its diversity and equality requirements by allowing greater input into the decision-making and governance processes by Members and officers, which leads to increased accountability and access for members of the public.

## 7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children)

There are no other implications attached to this report.

## 8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

## 9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1: Overview and Scrutiny at Thurrock Council – A Review

### Report Author:

Lucy Tricker & Wendy Le  
Democratic Services  
Finance, Governance and Property

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Report of the  
**Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee:**

**Overview and Scrutiny at Thurrock  
Council: A Review  
2019/20**



**Contact:**

Democratic Services

Thurrock Council

[Direct.democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)





## Lead Member's Foreword

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee is a scrutiny committee made up of local councillors who want to improve services for residents', and monitor the Council's overall performance.

Between 2018 and 2020, as the Chair of the Committee, I oversaw an in-depth review into scrutiny practices at Thurrock Council and how this function could be improved for residents, Members and officers. We chose to review this function as Members felt there was room for improvement, and a chance for backbench Members to make more of an impact to services and policies throughout the Council. A review was subsequently agreed following a motion made at Full Council in October 2018, which raised questions into the effectiveness of scrutiny and the motions process at Thurrock Council. We felt that this was an important area to review to ensure that Members could effectively ensure the accountability of the Council, which will make sure that residents are receiving the best services and the best value for money.

This report sets out the current picture of scrutiny at Thurrock, and how we have worked throughout this review to improve and change current practice. This includes how other Councils are currently running their scrutiny function; the powers that overview and scrutiny have in law; and workshop sessions with scrutiny Members and the Executive to communicate ideas and recommendations.

### **Councillor Oliver Gerrish**

Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Lead Member for the Scrutiny Review

## **Structural Recommendations**

- 1. Establish an Executive-Scrutiny Protocol to ensure a formal process for scrutiny comments to reach the Executive.**
- 2. Every Overview and Scrutiny Committee to have an over-arching topic-led project that they manage throughout the municipal year.**
- 3. Portfolio Holders are invited to attend Overview and Scrutiny Committees to answer questions.**
- 4. Members to commit to Committee specific training at the start of the municipal year, with Chairs to receive specific Chairs training.**
- 5. Members agree that the number of scrutiny Committees meets the requirements of the Council, and ensures each Committee can fulfil their role.**
- 6. Members agree that overview and scrutiny processes with regards to call-ins are to remain the same, taking into account the research undertaken by officers into best practice at other Councils.**
- 7. Members agree that the motions process works effectively at Thurrock Council, although quarterly update reports on motions will be provided to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their comment and oversight.**

## **Developmental Recommendations**

- 8. Selected reports for pre-scrutiny come to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee earlier in the policy development process, so scrutiny comments can be included in policies.**
- 9. The number of 'to note' reports to be reduced, by emailing 'to note' reports to Committee Members for comment.**
- 10. The Work Programme to be more Member-led. A discussion to happen at the beginning of each municipal year regarding which reports would be sent through committee throughout the year.**



## Timeline Summary

**31 October 2018:** motion to Full Council to review the scrutiny function and motions process.

**4 December 2018:** Democratic Services attended the Centre for Public Scrutiny's Annual Scrutiny Conference to understand scrutiny at a national level, and discuss the review with Councils across the country.

**31 January 2019:** first meeting of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss the Centre for Public Scrutiny's Evaluation Framework and the initial key lines of enquiry.

**5 March 2019:** Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee outlined the projects for the review and agreed consultation.

**26 September 2019:** The Scrutiny Symposium – all scrutiny Members were invited to attend the event hosted by Dr Dave McKenna from the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

**6 March 2020:** Democratic Services attended the Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) Scrutiny Conference to discuss national legislation developments regarding scrutiny.

**10 March 2020:** The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a verbal update on the review, and the Committee provided additional guidance and comments to be included in the final document.

**14 September 2020:** After some delay due to COVID-19, the Committee met with the Leader and selected Portfolio Holders to discuss the review, particularly the Executive-Scrutiny Protocol.

**10 November 2020:** The final review document will be submitted to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their agreement.

**9 December 2020:** The Scrutiny Review will be submitted to Cabinet for their comment and sign off.

## Introduction

1.1 For a number of years, the idea of reforming the scrutiny function has been discussed at Thurrock Council, both by officers and Members from all parties. It was felt there was room for improvement, both to engage Members, and improve the supporting processes and procedures.

1.2 The idea for this review came from a variety of sources, including from a motion at the meeting of Full Council on 31 October 2018 reading:

*'Full Council asks for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, under its cross-cutting remit on overall performance, monitoring and steering of the overview and scrutiny function, to look into:*

- *The effectiveness of overview and scrutiny processes at Thurrock Council*
- *The effectiveness of Motions agreed at Full Council'*

1.3 In response to the motion, the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned a report, which was discussed at Committee on 31 January 2019 to outline a potential review. We agreed that the initial key lines of enquiry would be:

1. What does overview and scrutiny look like at Thurrock Council, and how does the Council meet the national framework for scrutiny and governance?
2. How effective is the overview and scrutiny process in Thurrock Council, in terms of both quantitative and qualitative data?
3. How effective is the motions process, once they have been agreed at Full Council?

### Key Line of Enquiry 1: Evaluation Framework

1.4 To answer the first key line of enquiry, the Committee spent time discussing the Centre for Public Scrutiny's (CfPS) Evaluation Framework, which are the national guidelines on good scrutiny at a local authority, which every Council should follow. One of our key focusses at this meeting was whether Thurrock Council met the Framework, which would provide a good baseline for the review.

1.5 Upon reviewing the CfPS Evaluation Framework we found that Thurrock Council met the national guidelines, and the detail of this can be found at Appendix 3.

1.6 Although Thurrock Council met the overall national guidelines, we felt that there could be improvement, and wished to further scrutinise the following areas as part of our review:

- **Work Programme:**
  - More input from scrutiny Members in shaping the Work Programme, in terms of what reports, issues or items they would like to see.
- **External Committee Activities:**
  - Increase activity between meetings to allow Committee Members the chance to strengthen their understanding and knowledge of issues, for example site visits.
- **Focussed Training Sessions:**
  - Members could benefit from focussed short training sessions specific to overview and scrutiny throughout the year. For Members who join a Committee during the municipal year, a trainer could provide an individual training session.
- **Time Management of Meetings:**
  - Improve the efficiency of meetings to ensure each agenda item has an appropriate amount of time allocated. This would give Members enough time to discuss agenda items and prevent one item running on longer than necessary.
- **Relationship with Cabinet:**
  - A closer relationship between the Executive and scrutiny functions, with a more impactful role for scrutiny.

## Key Line of Enquiry 2: Quantitative Data

- 1.7 In regards to the second line of enquiry, we asked Democratic Services to undertake a quantitative study regarding the types of reports that came before all scrutiny Committees between 2014 and 2018. The outcome of this study can be found below:

Type of report	Percentage of Total Reports
Pre-scrutiny (reports that have to be signed-off by scrutiny before being approved at Cabinet)	16%
Update reports	22%
'To note' reports	45%
Actionable reports (reports that had recommendations that required Member participation to progress the Council's work)	17%

- 1.8 Members felt that, based on these figures, there were too many ‘to note’ reports coming before scrutiny Committees, and not enough actionable reports, through which Members could make changes and develop policy.
- 1.9 Democratic Services also spoke to scrutiny Members as part of their qualitative research, and they expressed concern regarding how impactful scrutiny could be, as they felt that ‘to note’ reports and update reports reduced the influence that the scrutiny function could have on policy development. Members also felt that although pre-scrutiny reduced the need for call-ins, they were an important part of the scrutiny function.

### **Key Line of Enquiry 3: Motions**

- 1.10 We also undertook a study of motions at Thurrock, focussing on motions from between 2014 and 2018. They were broken down into the categories below:

Year	Actions resulting from Motions				
	Additional Committee Work Undertaken (such as extra research by Committees)	Work with external bodies	Work with Central Government and MPs	No update required	Motion Unanswered
2014/15	5	2	4	2	0
2015/16	7	8	4	1	0
2016/17	6	1	3	0	0
2017/18	2	2	5	0	0

- 1.11 As no motions were left unanswered, and many resulted in Committee’s undertaking additional work, the Committee felt that the motions process at Thurrock worked relatively effectively.

## The Review

- 2.1 Following the discussion regarding the initial key lines of enquiry, Members agreed to undertake a consultation and project on the aspirations for future delivery of overview and scrutiny.
- 2.2 The Democratic Services team and the Chair of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny then held a series of meetings to discuss how the project should take shape, and the outcomes Members wanted to see once it was finished. The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee then deliberated over the proposed project at its meeting on 5 March 2019. The Committee agreed three 'activities' for the project to undertake:

### Plan of Activities

<b>Name of Event</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
The Scrutiny Symposium	Members agreed that the event would include all scrutiny Members, and would take place after the first meetings of the municipal year were held. An independent organisation would run the event to ensure it was politically neutral. The symposium would focus on the positives and the challenges of being a scrutiny Member; the community and scrutiny; and the scrutiny governance process.
An Executive-Scrutiny Workshop	This would include Members from the Corporate O&S Committee and selected Portfolio Holders, as well as the Leader. The Workshop would consider how recommendations moved from scrutiny to Cabinet and vice versa; and how to increase communication between the two branches of local government.
Comparative Exercise	To compare the overview and scrutiny function at Thurrock with neighbouring councils, and other unitary authorities. This would also include governance and legislation regarding the role that overview and scrutiny can play in an Executive system, and the current scrutiny debate at a national level.

## Terms of Reference and Targeted Outcomes

### Terms of Reference

- 3.1 Following the agreement of the review 'project activities', the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the Terms of Reference for the project, and the outcomes Members would like to see.
- 3.2 These were formulated into four key questions, which would be answered by the end of the review:
- 1. Is there enough co-ordination between scrutiny committees and the Executive?**
  - 2. Is there a formal process for scrutiny Committee Members to be heard at Cabinet?**
  - 3. Does the content provided at scrutiny Committee's satisfy Members aims and objectives?**
  - 4. Are there the right number of Committees at Thurrock, and do they have the right Terms of Reference?**
- 3.3 Members agreed that the outcomes of this review should ensure that the relationship between the Executive and scrutiny is functional and works well. It is also to ensure that Members are fully involved in the scrutiny process, and can help residents to the best of their ability.

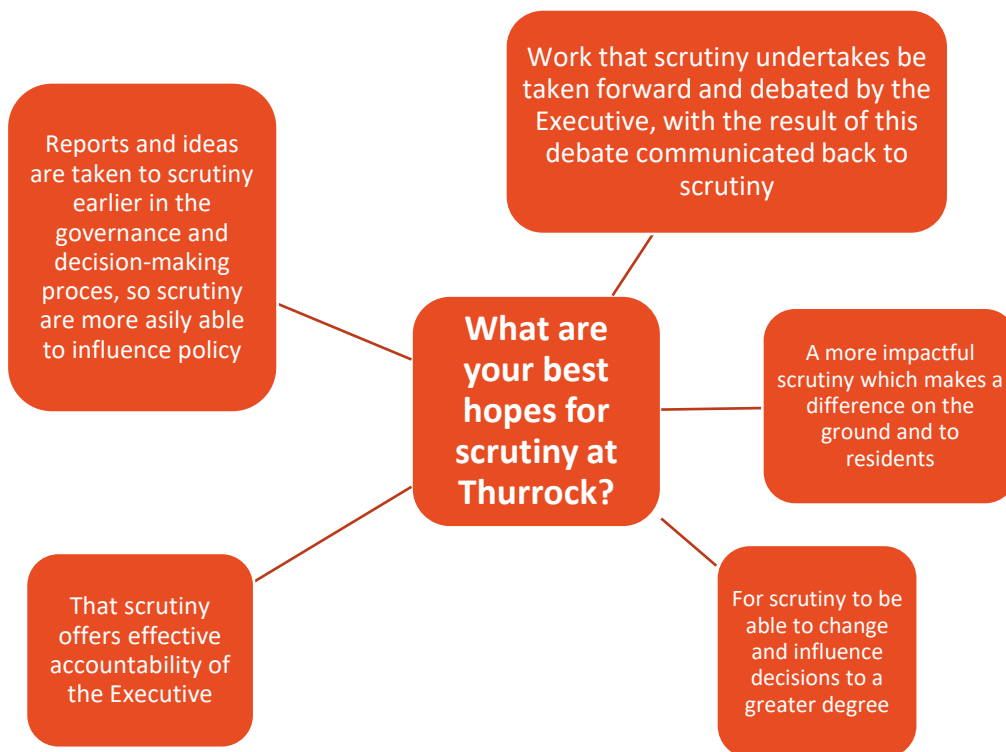
## The Scrutiny Symposium Event

4.1 Dr Dave McKenna, a representative from the Centre for Public Scrutiny, chaired the Scrutiny Symposium on Thursday 26 September 2019.



4.2 Dr McKenna organised the debate so the attendees could try to answer the four key questions outlined above, and also asked what Members wanted the future of scrutiny to look like.

### What are your best hopes for scrutiny at Thurrock?

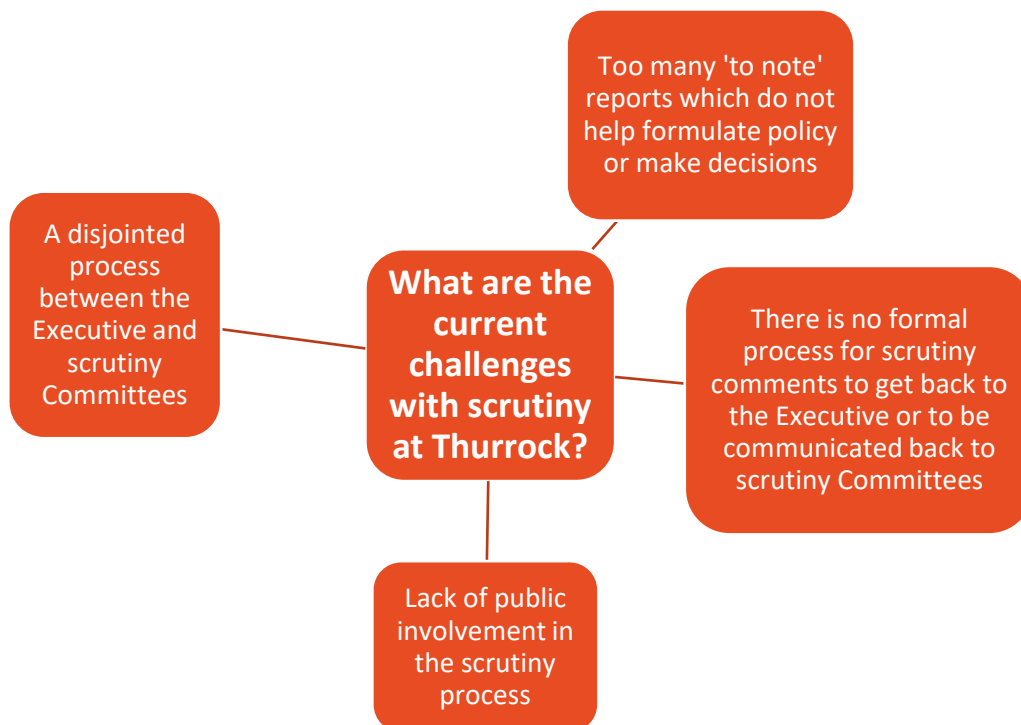


### Outcomes

4.3 Members felt from this discussion that the most important role for scrutiny at Thurrock was to make an impact, on both policy development and the lives of residents.

- 4.4 We felt that scrutiny could be more impactful if activities were engaged in between Committee meetings, such as training or site visits, to ensure that issues were progressed quickly and were brought to the Executive earlier in the policy development process.
- 4.5 One of the key action points that became clear from Members 'best hopes' was for increased communication between the Executive and the scrutiny function, to make sure scrutiny could fulfil their role successfully, and were able to make a larger impact.

**What are the current challenges with scrutiny in Thurrock?**



**Outcomes**

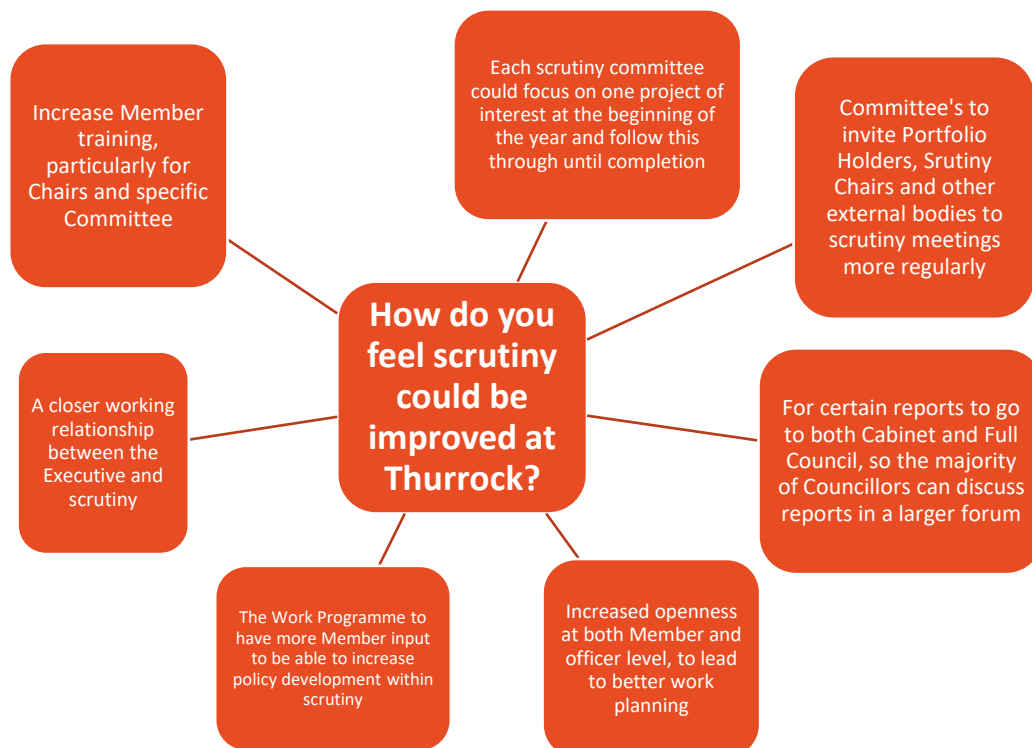
- 4.6 One of the main themes of this conversation was the lack of discussion between the Executive and scrutiny functions. Members wanted to formalise this process and ensure it was not 'disjointed', in order for good decisions to be made.
- 4.7 The idea arose of introducing a formal 'Executive-Scrutiny Protocol' to formalise the process, and ensure both functions were heard. It would also allow for more considered decision-making as reports would have been scrutinised, and would ensure that the Executive heard these comments, so



they could consider and make recommendations.

- 4.8 As shown in the diagram above, Members also felt there were too many 'to note' reports, and felt that if 'to note' reports were emailed to Members separately, more time could be used for in-depth scrutinising and policy development.

### How do Members feel scrutiny could be improved at Thurrock?



### Outcomes

- 4.9 Members felt that a better dialogue was needed at both Member and officer level, so better discussions could be had regarding reports presented before Committee, and more detailed work planning for the municipal year could take place.
- 4.10 On this basis, some Members suggested that the Chair of a scrutiny Committee could be involved in deciding the number of meetings every year, which would allow for flexibility regarding the Work Programme, and the development of reports. After much consideration, we felt that this idea would be impractical as officers needed to decide on the time of meetings before the election of a Chair at the beginning of the municipal year, in order to plan reports and the governance processes around this. We felt that scrutiny Chairs already had the prerogative to call extraordinary meetings when the

Work Programme became full, and the Committee could undertake extra work such as site visits throughout the year if required.

- 4.11 Members also suggested the idea that each scrutiny committee could decide on a 'project' at the beginning of the year, and could follow this through until completion. The project could revolve around one aspect of their scrutiny committee that interested Members, or was felt could help residents and the community. It could also be a way to involve residents in scrutiny across the borough.
- 4.12 In previous years, Thurrock has used the 'project' system, and this is still used in many Local Authorities such as the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.
- 4.13 We felt that by undertaking a 'project' Members could help residents with issues across the borough. It could also help scrutiny fulfil its policy development role, as O&S would send the projects recommendations to Cabinet for discussion and potential implementation.
- 4.14 We felt that Chairs and Committee training was already held throughout the year, with an external provider attending regularly to discuss Chairing skills, questioning skills, and how to make the most out of scrutiny meetings. These training sessions were poorly attended, and we felt that if Members pledged to attend, they would improve their skills and would not need additional specific training.
- 4.15 Members wished to invite Portfolio Holders, other scrutiny Chairs, and external bodies to scrutiny meetings to give the chance for them to ask questions, and for scrutiny to hold the Executive to account.
- 4.16 We felt that this invitation could take the form of answering questions regarding a specific report, or O&S Chairs could invite Portfolio Holders to answer questions about the performance of their service as a whole. This decision could be at the discretion of the Chair or whole committee.
- 4.17 Questions to Portfolio Holders could follow a similar system to Full Council, and be sent to Democratic Services and the Monitoring Officer prior to the meeting. This would ensure questions are in-line with the Constitution, and the process remains fair for all involved.
- 4.18 Members also felt that O&S Committees could send reports to both Cabinet and Full Council, so all Councillors could discuss important reports in a larger forum. We felt this was not in-line with governance processes, as under an Executive system, the Executive have the majority of the decision-making power. Reports of significant importance would still go to Full Council to add

weight to certain decisions.

- 4.19 Overall, Members had many suggestions in how to improve scrutiny at Thurrock. They were mainly themed around the relationship with the Executive, training, and policy development.
- 4.20 Some of these suggestions could not be implemented due to internal governance processes and legislation, but others were taken on board for the Corporate O&S Committee to discuss.

### What are the good things about scrutiny at Thurrock?

Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Well-organised by Democratic Services as information is always provided on time.</li></ul>
Collegial Environment & Objectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A collegiate environment in scrutiny committees with cross-party communication.</li><li>• Good interpersonal support between Members of all parties during scrutiny committees.</li><li>• No explicit party politics, and objective discussions.</li></ul>
External Attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Often successful at requesting external partners to attend with good questions asked by scrutiny Members.</li><li>• Good Member and officer attendance at scrutiny.</li></ul>
Number of Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The right number of committees that were able to scrutinise each directorate, under specific and separate remits.</li></ul>

### Outcomes

- 4.21 Members had many positive comments regarding scrutiny in Thurrock, and felt that O&S Committees could produce good outcomes, such as the establishment of the Lower Thames Crossing and Local Development Plan Task and Finish Groups; the work on the Tree Strategy by the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and the Garages Review undertaken by the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

4.22 From these comments, we can see that Members are happy with the quality and content of reports, and the attitudes of officers. As previously mentioned, Thurrock Council met the CfPS National Evaluation Framework, although some areas needed additional scrutiny.

### Conclusions

4.23 The key areas for action, as taken from the symposium can be collated into three areas:



## The Executive-Scrutiny Workshop

- 5.1 As part of this review, we felt that a discussion with Members of the Executive would be useful at this juncture to understand how they felt the relationship between the two functions worked, and how they felt it could be improved.
- 5.2 This workshop was held on Monday 14 September 2020 between Members of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Executive, via Microsoft Teams.
- 5.3 The aim of this workshop was to:
- Study the Executive-Scrutiny Protocol
  - Discuss the recommendations outlined in the review
  - Consider the relationship between the Executive and scrutiny functions from the Cabinet perspective, and how this could be improved
- 5.4 The meeting was attended by Councillors Huelin, Mayes and Watkins for the Executive function, and Councillors Gerrish and Ralph for the scrutiny function. The Leader's views were represented by the Democratic Services Manager, at the Leader's request.
- 5.5 The meeting began with an introduction by Democratic Services, which included the story so far, the purpose of the meeting, and future aims and goals. Members of the workshop discussed the recommendations point-by-point, including how they thought these could be implemented and any changes they wished to see.
- 5.6 Overall, Members from both the Executive and scrutiny functions agreed with all of the proposed recommendations.
- 5.7 Members raised the following areas as action points:
- Members wished to see additional training for scrutiny committee members and Chairs, which would include training on: the proposed Executive-Scrutiny Protocol; the role and powers of the chair and vice-chair; how to compose questions for Cabinet; and the powers of scrutiny in the Constitution.
  - Recommendations to be divided into short term recommendations and long-term ambitions, as some (for example recommendations two and six) would require a long-term change in the council's working practices and procedures.
  - Members requested that the proposed over-arching topic project fulfil the SMART objectives, and were discussed beforehand in collaboration with the relevant Portfolio Holder and officers.
  - Members requested that recommendation ten be included as part of the Work Programme, so Committees could take action if necessary, but did not take up time as a full agenda item.

## Comparative Evaluation

6.1 We asked officers to undertake comparative research which looked into the following areas:

- The number of Committees
- Pre-scrutiny processes
- The call-in process

6.2 We also asked for additional information regarding the following factors that influenced overview and scrutiny:

- Legal rights of scrutiny
- The current debate on the role and value of scrutiny

6.3 Our research focussed on other unitary local authorities (ULA) and Thurrock's neighbouring boroughs, as well as other Councils to note.

### **Other Unitary Local Authorities (ULAs)**

6.4 The average number of scrutiny committees for ULAs were three, as outlined in Appendix 4, with most of these having an Overview and Scrutiny Board or Commission to manage the Work Programmes of scrutiny committees. In some ULAs, Task and Finish Groups regularly commissioned in-depth reviews on time-limited matters.

6.5 Thurrock Council therefore has comparatively 50% more scrutiny committees than those studied, but follows a similar process of commissioning Task and Finish Groups to undertake detailed research.

6.6 As the majority of the ULAs use the Leader-Executive system, the decision-making process is similar as in Thurrock, with decisions being considered by a scrutiny committee before being sent to Cabinet for agreement. Therefore, pre-scrutiny is a common occurrence across other ULAs studied. Both the Centre for Public Scrutiny and Local Government Association also recommended a process of pre-scrutiny.

6.7 The call-in process for most of the ULAs are also similar to Thurrock Councils, with a deadline given of a call-in to be received within 5 working days of a published decision.

6.8 The majority of other ULAs benchmarked had an Executive-Scrutiny Protocol in place, which shows that Thurrock Council would be undertaking best practice if it introduced one. In addition, the Overview and Scrutiny Committees at Medway Council have a standing annual item on the agenda where the Portfolio Holder is held to account on the performance of their Portfolio, and this may be something that Thurrock wishes to consider.

## Thurrock's Geographical Neighbours

- 6.9 Scrutiny processes in Thurrock's geographical neighbours varied dramatically with no similarity between each one and none similar to Thurrock's scrutiny process, as demonstrated in Appendix 4. For example, Southend operate a system of post-scrutiny with focus on call-ins, and the Portfolio Holder at the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham is called upon to introduce the report to scrutiny, and answer any questions the Committee may have.
- 6.10 Across Thurrock's geographical neighbours, where a call-in deadline is given, the average is within 5 working days of a published decision that has not yet been implemented. Both the London Borough of Havering and Basildon Council have a scrutiny board in place to monitor the call-in process and to decide whether a call-in is upheld or declined.

### Other Councils of note

- 6.11 Throughout the Committee's research, other Councils were contacted through the Association of Democratic Services Officers, and although these did not fit into our benchmarking categories, their scrutiny procedures were interesting and therefore included in this review.

Hertfordshire  
County Council

Southwark  
Council

Suffolk County  
Council

Use Task and Finish Groups rather than scrutiny committees, and hold one 'scrutiny day' per year, with an additional half day to agree recommendations

Hold regular interviews with Portfolio Holders to discuss scrutiny, and what reports the Executive would like scrutiny to focus on

Work Programmes are agreed by the Cabinet and Full Council, so all Members are aware of any upcoming work

## **The Legal Rights of Scrutiny**

6.12 The legal rights of scrutiny are set out in the Local Government Act 2000 as well as other legislation, and are intended to counter the Executive structures that were created by the same Act.

6.13 The powers of overview and scrutiny in legislation are listed below:

- Any Member of scrutiny has the right to refer a relevant matter to the committee.
- Overview and scrutiny committees may hold inquiries and produce reports.
- Scrutiny Committees have the power to 'call in' decisions made by the Executive. They may then review a decision and recommend that the council reconsider it. The government guidance implies that call-in would be expected to be used as a last resort when other methods of engagement have failed.
- Committees may require Executive Members and officers of the authority to appear before them. Individuals from outside the Council can be invited, but are not compelled to attend.
- Overview and scrutiny reports must receive a response from the Executive within two months.
- Scrutiny Committees cannot oblige either the Council or Executive to act upon their findings.

6.14 Under law, Thurrock Council is in line with legislation, but Members could use these powers more frequently, such as inviting Portfolio Holders to scrutiny meetings.

## **The Current Debate on the Role and Value of Scrutiny**

6.15 As part of the review, we felt it was important to understand the current debates regarding overview and scrutiny on a national level.

6.16 To understand the current debate regarding scrutiny, and to find out what successful governance looked like at other Councils, the Committee decided to attend the Centre for Public Scrutiny's (CfPS) annual scrutiny conference. A number of topics were discussed, and it gave a good starting point for best practice research amongst other Councils. The diagrams below outline the main topics raised.



## What does successful scrutiny governance look like at a national level?

Concentration on scrutiny's raison d'etre - management and not oversight.

Members should 'get something out of it' so they feel more included and make a difference.

Scrutiny should give a level of accountability regarding commercialisation and council owned companies.

Should include residents to increase transparency and hold the Executive to account.

Open and transparent decision making - accurate information and appropriate advice given.

Take into account 'social value added', so every report and procurement exercise should focus on how social value could be added, rather than simply money.

Strong leadership to promote integrity and respect.

6.17 In conclusion, the main debate at a national level regarding scrutiny was making sure that Councils operate a transparent governance and scrutiny process, that ensures Members feel included and can make a difference. We felt that Thurrock operated an open system of governance, but both the Executive and scrutiny were able to use closed sessions to discuss commercially sensitive information, and other exempt/confidential reports.

6.18 This has helped to shape the outcomes of this review, as this national debate has remained one of the focusses. As Members wished to be more included in the process, this will bring Thurrock in-line with the national debate, this has been included in the recommendations.

## List of Recommendations arising from this Review

The Committee recommends that:

### **1. Establish an Executive-Scrutiny Protocol to ensure a formal process for scrutiny comments to reach the Executive.**

*We felt that by introducing an Executive-Scrutiny Protocol, the governance procedure would become clearer for both Cabinet and scrutiny Members. Communication between the two branches could improve and comments from both could be more easily included in reports and during meetings. Guidance from the central government published in May 2019 suggested that every local authority introduce an Executive-Scrutiny Protocol and numerous other Councils have already adopted this. The impact of this recommendation would be to formalise a process that already exists, and ensure that both Members and Officers are aware of the relationship between scrutiny and the Executive. This Protocol will also be included within Members training, so all are aware of the statutory and constitutional powers of scrutiny. The Executive-Scrutiny Protocol is listed at Appendix 1.*

### **2. Every Overview and Scrutiny Committee to have an over-arching topic-led project that they manage throughout the municipal year.**

*Overview and Scrutiny Committees pledge to identify an issue to investigate and develop in the course of a municipal year, in collaboration with officers and other Members. We felt that by introducing one overarching project for each Committee, every year Members could understand areas of concern and work in greater depth. All projects would be discussed beforehand with the relevant Portfolio Holder and officers, and follow the SMART objective guidelines.*

**3. Portfolio Holders are invited to attend Overview and Scrutiny Committees to answer questions.**

*Portfolio Holders are invited once a year to field questions from Members of the Committee on specific agenda items or areas of concern. We felt that this would greater fulfil scrutiny's ability to scrutinise Cabinet Members and increase accountability. The process will be outlined in the Executive-Scrutiny Protocol. In this way, all questions will be regulated to ensure they adhere to Council rules, whilst allowing Members freedom to ask a variety of questions.*

**4. Members commit to Committee specific training at the start of the municipal year, with Chairs to receive specific Chairs training**

*A detailed Members training programme is released at the start of every municipal year, and this includes Committee training, Chair's training, Work Programme training, Community Leadership training and other mandatory training such as Licensing and Planning. Scrutiny Members commit to attend these training sessions regularly to be aware of guidance and best practice. If Members attend these training sessions, but still feel there are gaps in their knowledge, Democratic Services can look into other training sessions that could be provided to Members.*

**5. Members agree that the number of scrutiny Committees meets the requirements of the Council, and ensures each Committee can fulfil their role.**

*As evidenced in the report (Appendix 4) Thurrock Council have a greater number of scrutiny Committees than other neighbouring councils, and other unitary authorities. Despite this, we felt that Thurrock had the appropriate number of scrutiny Committees that had specific and separate remits, and were able to undertake pre-scrutiny and consider a number of reports successfully.*

- 6. Members agree that overview and scrutiny processes with regards to call-ins are to remain the same, taking into account the research undertaken by officers into best practice at other Councils.**

*As evidenced in the report Thurrock Council are in line with other Councils in terms of call-ins. Scrutiny Committees have the opportunity to call-in any report which has not been through pre-scrutiny, and although some Members felt unhappy with this, the process is in line with best practice guidance from the Centre for Public Scrutiny, other Councils and the Local Government Association.*

- 7. Members agree that the motions process works effectively at Thurrock Council, although a quarterly report on motions will be provided to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their comment and oversight.**

*As based on evidence provided earlier in the review, Members felt that the motions process worked effectively at Thurrock, with no motions going unanswered, and the majority leading to additional and useful work. Members did wish to have increased oversight of motions presented at Full Council, and it was felt that a quarterly item should be added to the Work Programme, so the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee could be updated on motions under their remit and maintain oversight.*

## Developmental Recommendations

- 8. Selected reports for pre-scrutiny come to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee earlier in the policy development process, so scrutiny comments can be included in policies.**

*As a part of this review, we felt that Members did not have enough time to fulfil their role of policy development (Thurrock Constitution, Chapter 4, Part – Article 6), as reports came before committee late in the process. We understand that this is not always possible due to timelines; therefore, we feel that at the beginning of the municipal year Members and officers could agree on two or three reports that could include additional time for scrutiny to undertake policy development. The additional scrutiny would therefore be more detailed, as the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would have more time to consider alternative ideas and proposals. In addition, those reports that have not been pre-scrutinised could be called-in under the standard procedures outlined in Thurrock's Constitution.*

- 9. The number of 'to note' reports be reduced, by emailing 'to note' reports to Committee Members for comment.**

*We felt that scrutiny had too many 'to note' reports, which were taking up time and resources, but did not help the scrutiny Committee fulfil their statutory role. To solve this issue, it is recommended that Democratic Services work with officers to ensure that all officers are aware of the report writing guidance, and the need to reduce 'to note' reports. Officers would then work collaboratively to decide if a 'to note' report needed to go before the Committee, or could be emailed to the relevant scrutiny Members. If a 'to note' report was emailed to Members, they would still have the ability to ask questions and make comments to officers via email, or could ask for the report 'to be tabled' for the Committee meeting, if more serious concerns were raised.*

**10. The Work Programme be more Member-led. A discussion to happen at the beginning of each municipal year regarding which reports would be sent through committee throughout the year.**

*Although Members can already suggest items for the Work Programme, Members and officers will commit through this review to enhance this in future. This will also be helped by Members commitment to undertake specific Work Programme training. Chairs will ensure that the Committee agree to one over-arching focus report at the beginning of year (as stated in recommendation 3), and discuss what other issues they would like to receive reports on. This will ensure that a specific scrutiny Committee can cover every topic that falls under their remit within one municipal year.*

## Next Steps

### Evaluation

- 7.1 Overall, we feel that the review has been successful, and has considered a range of options and ways to move forward.
- 7.2 Unfortunately, this review did not get to consider topics such as how to increase public involvement in scrutiny, as we wanted to keep the review timely. In addition, public involvement is a very large topic and it therefore would have been difficult to look at both public involvement and scrutiny processes in enough detail within one review.
- 7.3 The issue of public involvement in scrutiny is something that should be considered at a later date, if Members so wish.
- 7.4 In addition, there were a number of delays with the report, due to an unexpected general election in 2019, and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Implementation

- 7.5 Implementation of this review will begin at the start of the 2021/22 municipal year, with individual committee discussions happening in late 2020/21 to ensure the necessary preparations are made.
- 7.6 Once the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet have agreed the recommendations, they will become a good practice guide, along with the Executive-Scrutiny Protocol.
- 7.7 The diagram below shows the life cycle of the 'ideal report' through the Committee system, once recommendations of this review have been agreed and implemented.

### First stage (September 2021)

- Officers will write a report, to be sent to the relevant overview and scrutiny committee.
- The scrutiny committee will then make comment, potentially asking for extra information, and make additional recommendations.

### Second stage (December 2021)

- Officers will then go and make the discussed changes to the report
- The Executive will then have the opportunity to consider the report, including scrutiny comments, and will debate.
- After the debate, the Executive will potentially agree the recommendations, including those made by scrutiny.

### Third stage (January 2022)

- The Committee will receive a briefing note regarding the debate had at Cabinet, so they are aware of the decision and comments made.



## **Appendices**

**Appendix 1: The Executive Scrutiny Protocol**

**Appendix 2: Scoping, Methodology and Bibliography to the Review**

**Appendix 3: The Centre for Public Scrutiny's Evaluation Framework**

**Appendix 4: Comparative and Benchmarking Research**

# Appendix 1 - Thurrock Council's Executive-Scrutiny Protocol

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Executive-Scrutiny Protocol is a guide for Portfolio Holders and Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committees, which outlines the relationship between the two functions, and the procedural processes that underpin this. This protocol draws on Thurrock Council's Constitution, and the purpose is to establish helpful operating guidelines to aid governance.

## 2. Constitutional Basis of the Executive-Scrutiny Relationship

- 2.1 Scrutiny's role is to act as a 'critical friend' to the Cabinet and Full Council in order to promote better services, policies and decisions. Scrutiny's role and powers is set out in Chapter 4 of Thurrock Council's Constitution and can be summarised as:

- The power to call-in Executive decisions
- The power to consider Councillor call for action
- The power to establish Working Groups and Task & Finish Groups
- The power to consider reports regarding crime and disorder and health
- The power to consider urgent and very urgent items of business

## 3. Functions of Overview and Scrutiny

- 3.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committees power is outlined in Chapter 4, Part 1, Article 6 of Thurrock's Constitution and have the ability to:

1. Review and scrutinise any decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the Council's functions
2. Make reports and recommendations to the Cabinet and/or Full Council and/or any Committee in connection with the discharge of any functions
3. Consider any matter affecting the area of Thurrock or its inhabitants and make reports and recommendations
4. In accordance with the procedures for Call-In, exercise the right to Call-In for reconsideration decisions falling within their remit that have been made but not yet implemented by the Cabinet or on behalf of the Cabinet, and undertake reviews aiming to improve the efficient and effective delivery of services to local people.
5. Assist the Council and the Cabinet in the development of its Budget and Policy Framework by analysis of policy issues or proposed projects.

6. Conduct research, community and other consultation in the analysis of policy issues or proposed projects and possible options.
7. Consider and implement mechanisms to encourage and enhance community participation in the development of policy or project options.
8. Question Members of the Cabinet, Committees and senior Officers of the Council, and representatives of other public, business, or voluntary/community sector bodies, about their views on issues and proposals affecting the area.
9. Liaise with other external organisations operating in the area, whether national, regional or local, to ensure the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working.
10. Review and scrutinise the decisions made by, and the performance of, the Cabinet, Committees and Council officers, both in relation to individual decisions and over time.
11. Review and scrutinise the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets, and/or particular service areas.

#### **4. Executive Attendance at Overview and Scrutiny Committees**

- 4.1 Cabinet Members will not be expected to attend all scrutiny meetings, but may do so if they wish. Their participation in any meeting will be at the gift of the Overview and Scrutiny Chair.
- 4.2 Overview and Scrutiny Committees are entitled under s21 of the Local Government Act 2000 to require any Members of the Executive or any Senior Officer to attend to give account for any matter within their responsibility or remit, particularly relating to:
  - A particular decision
  - The actions that have been taken to implement Council policy
  - Performance
- 4.3 It is the duty of those persons to attend if so required. When a scrutiny committee wishes to invite a Cabinet Member, Officer or another individual to a meeting it will:
  - Provide a minimum of two weeks' notice
  - Outline the reason that the individual has been requested to attend and the likely areas upon which they are expected to answer questions
  - Identify whether any papers are required to be produced

- 4.4 On an annual basis, the relevant Portfolio Holder will be required to attend a meeting of the relevant scrutiny committee, to discuss performance, answer questions on specific reports, and be held accountable via questions from scrutiny Members.
- 4.5 Members of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee will have the opportunity to submit advance questions to the Portfolio Holder with a deadline for submission being 5pm, ten working days before the meeting. This will allow Portfolio Holder's and officers to prepare an informed response to these questions. The Chair will have the prerogative to accept questions without notice once all questions on notice have been answered and to further manage the debate of the meeting.
- 4.6 All other issues pertaining to questions and debate will follow the Council Procedure Rules, as laid out at Chapter 2, Part 2 of Thurrock's Constitution.

## **5. Overview and Scrutiny Attendance at Cabinet**

- 5.1 The Chair, or appropriate Members if the Chair is not available, of a scrutiny committee may be called by the Executive to present a report or answer questions. If the Executive wish to invite a Member of scrutiny then they must provide two weeks' notice, and outline the reason why the individual has been requested and the likely areas upon which they are expected to answer questions.

## **6. Responding to Scrutiny's Recommendations**

- 6.1 Scrutiny Committees will agree outcomes of their meetings and detail any conclusions and recommendations in the formal minutes. Reports that then follow the governance procedure and go to Cabinet for sign-off must include details of those conclusions and recommendations made at the meeting of overview and scrutiny.
- 6.2 If the Cabinet report has been published before the overview and scrutiny meeting has been held, the recommendations made at overview and scrutiny must still be communicated to the Executive. This can be done in two ways:
1. Cabinet will table a briefing note, which explains discussions held and clearly sets out the formal recommendations made by the scrutiny Committee. The report author will draft the briefing note, which will receive sign-off through internal governance procedure.
  2. The Portfolio Holder introducing the report can provide a verbal update to Cabinet outlining discussions and recommendations made by the scrutiny Committee. This will only be acceptable if the time between the scrutiny Committee and Cabinet meeting (or vice versa) is so short that is impractical to provide a briefing note.
- 6.3 Non-Executive Members, including scrutiny Members, have the opportunity to ask questions at Cabinet on any agenda item, and the rules for this process

are set out in the Constitution at Chapter 3, Part 2. For example, the question must be received by midday two working days before the Cabinet meeting is due to be held.

- 6.4 Outside of the pre-scrutiny process, the Chair may formally raise concerns via a Chairs Letter directed to the relevant Cabinet Member(s), and the Cabinet Member must respond within four weeks indicating whether the recommendation needs to be referred or what action they intend to take. The Chair's Letter and Executive Member's response will be filed with Democratic Services, with a record being kept for reference.

## **Appendix 2 - Methodology and Bibliography to the Review**

This appendix outlines the methodology of this review, and includes the different methods the Committee used to collate evidence for potential recommendations.

### **Overview of the Methodology**

- 1.1 This review gathered evidence in between the Committee's meetings held between December 2018 and September 2020. Details of evidence gathered, as well as outside organisations and their contributions to this Review are outlined below:

#### **Centre for Public Scrutiny**

- 1.2 The Centre for Public Scrutiny is the 'national centre of expertise on governance and scrutiny' and provided consultancy, research and practical support throughout our review.
- 1.3 Towards the beginning of the review on 4 December 2018, Democratic Services Officers attended a Centre for Public Scrutiny conference, to discuss scrutiny with other local authorities from all over the country, to find examples of best practice and advice regarding this review. Outcomes and discussions held during this conference are included in the main body of this review.
- 1.4 On 26 September 2019, Dr Dave McKenna from the Centre for Public Scrutiny chaired the scrutiny symposium and helped to frame the debate and discussion between Members.
- 1.5 The Centre for Public Scrutiny also provided examples of best scrutiny practice to officers throughout this review, as well as providing advice and guidance.

#### **Other Local Authorities**

- 1.6 Throughout this review, Democratic Services have been in contact with other Local Authorities to understand how their democratic process works.
- 1.7 Democratic Services Officers have also contacted the Association for Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) to gather ideas and research for the comparative section of this review.

## Bibliography

1.8 During the Review, Democratic Services Officers considered the following pieces of research and evidence, the most important of which were presented before the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1.9 Centre for Public Scrutiny, The Good Scrutiny Guide - <https://www.cfps.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CfPS-Good-Scrutiny-Guide-v5-WEB-SINGLE-PAGES.pdf> - June 2019

1.10 Centre for Public Scrutiny Evaluation Framework Analysis - <https://www.cfps.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CfPS-Scrutiny-Evaluation-v2-SINGLE-PAGES.pdf> - April 2017

This was presented to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 31 January 2019, with analysis on how Thurrock Council met the framework and areas for improvement to be included in this review:

<https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s23015/The%20Overview%20and%20Scrutiny%20Functions%20and%20Motions%20Process.pdf>

1.11 House of Commons Library Briefing Paper, Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government - <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06520#fullreport> – June 2019

1.12 Essex County Council Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2018/19 - [https://assets.ctfassets.net/knkzaf64jx5x/71DFSTQ2EdENHYlfrpL7em/15de9476b394f785feadce8947aaf929/Scrutiny\\_Activity\\_2018-19.pdf](https://assets.ctfassets.net/knkzaf64jx5x/71DFSTQ2EdENHYlfrpL7em/15de9476b394f785feadce8947aaf929/Scrutiny_Activity_2018-19.pdf) - June 2019

1.13 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities - [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/800048/Statutory\\_Guidance\\_on\\_Overview\\_and\\_Scrutiny\\_in\\_Local\\_and\\_Combined\\_Authorities.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/800048/Statutory_Guidance_on_Overview_and_Scrutiny_in_Local_and_Combined_Authorities.pdf) - May 2019

A report on this guidance was presented to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14 January 2020, with analysis on how Thurrock Council meets the guidance, and areas for improvement to be included in this review.

## Appendix 3 - The Centre for Public Scrutiny's National Framework: Thurrock's Self-Evaluation

<u>CfPS Scrutiny Evaluation Framework Characteristics</u>	<u>Thurrock's scrutiny process</u>
<p>1. Overview and scrutiny (O&amp;S) has a clearly defined and valued role in the council's improvement and governance arrangements.</p>	<p>The current administration follows a pre-scrutiny process where the majority of reports with key decisions that are going to Cabinet, go through O&amp;S for Members of the Committee to scrutinise beforehand. In addition, Chairs of O&amp;S can attend Cabinet meetings to ask questions and make recommendations to an item on the agenda that relates to their O&amp;S committee, although this is not common practice at Thurrock.</p> <p>Every year Full Council debates the Annual Overview and Scrutiny report, which offers all Members a chance to debate the function of O&amp;S, and raises its public profile.</p>
<p>2. O&amp;S has the dedicated officer support it needs from officers who are able to undertake independent research effectively, and provide councillors with high-quality analysis, advice and training.</p>	<p>Dedicated support is provided by Democratic Services who ensure O&amp;S runs smoothly by organising meetings, checking the quality of reports and being the liaison between Committee Members and Officers. To give Councillors a better understanding of items on the agenda Democratic Services arrange site visits when Councillors request them. For example, Members of Cleaner, Greener and Safer O&amp;S have visited rubbish and waste sites to analyse potential problems regarding waste processing.</p> <p>At the beginning of each year, Democratic Services work with the relevant Directors and members to draw up the Work Programme and discuss which reports are due. If the Committee wish to amend the Work Programme, Democratic Services do this at the end of each meeting. Democratic Services ensure these reports are received and published on time, in line with statutory obligations.</p> <p>Officers undertake detailed research for each report that the Committee considers. Officers</p>



	<p>also benchmark against other councils on statistical data. For example, in Children's Services O&amp;S, Children's Social Care reports compare Thurrock's child assessment rates with the English average, Thurrock's statistical neighbours and with East England.</p> <p>A Director and report authors attend the meetings and are usually able to answer Members' questions in detail and provide answers by email for any questions that require further investigation. The Committee can also request reports and Democratic Services ensure the Work Programme reflects this.</p>
<p>3. O&amp;S provides viable and well-evidenced solutions to recognised problems.</p>	<p>Most of the reports brought to O&amp;S provide the Committee with an update on performance and plans within the service.</p> <p>Where a service has identified areas requiring more scrutiny, the Committee work to find solutions, with evidence provided by officers as to why/how it would work. For example, the Health and Wellbeing O&amp;S Committee commissioned the Orsett Hospital Task and Finish Group to look at the services and proposed closure of Orsett Hospital.</p> <p>The Committee also have to approve solutions before going ahead. For example, CGS O&amp;S had to approve the Tree Planting Strategy before final Cabinet approval. Committee Members also have to give comments and approval for update reports before moving onto the next stage or submitting a design. For example, the Planning, Transport, Regeneration O&amp;S request regular updates on the Purfleet Regeneration project at each stage of development. This gives the Committee a vital opportunity to offer alternatives to the suggested recommendations.</p>
<p>4. O&amp;S councillors have the training and development opportunities they need to undertake their role effectively.</p>	<p>Members are provided with scrutiny training (Committee Skills Member training) every municipal year. Individual and specialised scrutiny committee training is provided to Committee Members e.g. Health &amp; Wellbeing</p>

	<p>Adult Social Care Member training, Preventing Child Sexual Exploitation Member training.</p> <p>There are also opportunities for Members to attend external training sessions throughout the year.</p>
<p>5. The process receives effective support from the council's corporate management team who ensures that information provided to O&amp;S is of high quality and is provided in a timely and consistent manner.</p>	<p>There is effective support from the council's corporate management team who are aware of the pre-scrutiny process.</p> <p>To ensure the quality of O&amp;S reports, Directors Board discuss each report before final submission. In addition, the relevant Director, who is the 'sponsor', supports each O&amp;S and attend the Committee meeting to provide support to reports or answer questions.</p>
<p>6. O&amp;S is councillor-led, takes into account the views of the public, partners and other stakeholders, and balances the prioritisation of community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance.</p>	<p>Members lead O&amp;S, as they can request relevant reports to the Committee and influence service operations. For example, in Health and Wellbeing O&amp;S, HealthWatch raised an issue in relation to SERRIC, which led to the Committee requesting an additional report for more information. Additionally, Councillors can put forward a motion at Full Council requesting a relevant O&amp;S to look into an issue. For example, a Member raised a motion requesting the Cleaner, Greener and Safer O&amp;S to look into Tree Planting, and subsequently the Committee reviewed the Strategy and agreed a new approach.</p> <p>The Lower Thames Crossing is a prime example of prioritising Thurrock's community concerns, so much that a Task Force was set up for sole devotion to the opposition of the LTC. To ensure the local community had their own voice, Councillors called for representatives of the local community to be involved, with two community representatives and two business representatives.</p>
<p>7. O&amp;S meetings and activities are well planned, chaired effectively and make best use of the resources available to it.</p>	<p>Annual Council agree the forthcoming O&amp;S meetings for the municipal year, so meetings are planned far in advance. Extraordinary meetings or the setup of Task Force groups will</p>

	<p>usually have meetings planned at least a month in advance.</p> <p>The Chair can request briefings before the meeting, which are organised between Democratic Services and the Chair. In regards to the agenda, the reports arise from the Work Programme ,which is a combination of Officer and Member initiative.</p> <p>Available resources for meetings include rooms and IT equipment, which are always available for Officers and Members to use when booked in advance. There is also a small budget available for project work.</p>
<p>8. Decision-makers give public account for themselves at O&amp;S committees for their portfolio responsibilities.</p>	<p>Portfolio Holders rarely attend O&amp;S meetings at present, but Chairs could invite them to attend where necessary to answer the Committee’s questions. For example, Councillor Halden (former PFH for Education and Health) attended Children’s Services O&amp;S to answer questions on the Pilot Development for Head Start Housing for Vulnerable Young People and Care Leavers.</p>
<p>9. O&amp;S is recognised by the Executive and Corporate Management Team as an important council mechanism for community engagement, and facilitates greater citizen involvement in governance.</p>	<p>Most reports going to Cabinet usually go through O&amp;S first. Cabinet can request that reports to go back to O&amp;S, for example Cabinet asked the Housing O&amp;S Committee to consider the Grounds Maintenance Charge, and undertake detailed research into the proposed charge.</p> <p>In addition, the Constitution Working Group considered reducing the timeframe for submitting questions, and Full Council agreed this. This has facilitated greater citizen involvement and gave more importance to the function of O&amp;S.</p>
<p>10. O&amp;S is characterised by effective communication to raise awareness of, and encourage participation in democratic accountability.</p>	<p>The Communications Team in the Council tweets of upcoming O&amp;S committee meetings to notify the public. The public occasionally attend and they are able to ask questions or present a petition as set out in the Constitution under Chapter 4, Part 3 – section 5.</p>

	<p>In 2017, the Constitution Working Group reviewed public participation in the democratic process, and compiled a report. The improvements made from this were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council website was amended for better clarity.</li> <li>• The timeframe for the public to submit questions was reduced.</li> <li>• Clarity was given to the Mayor on accepting late questions at their discretion.</li> </ul>
<p>11. O&amp;S operates non-politically and deals effectively with sensitive political issues, tension and conflict.</p>	<p>There is no evidence of partisanship within the function and the Monitoring Officer has not received any complaints or evidence to the contrary.</p>
<p>12. O&amp;S builds trust and good relationships with a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders.</p>	<p>Trust is built with external stakeholders by ensuring solutions from council services have a positive impact. For example, Health and Wellbeing O&amp;S works together with the NHS; and Planning, Transport, Regeneration O&amp;S works with the C2C on train services. External representatives attend O&amp;S to provide reports and take comments and questions from Members.</p> <p>Other external stakeholders also attend O&amp;S Committees as Co-Opted Members, and provide updates. HealthWatch attends the Health and Wellbeing O&amp;S to provide the Committee with regular updates. In Cleaner, Greener and Safer O&amp;S, Essex Police have attended a recent meeting to discuss the Gang Related Violence Report, and presented the report with the Thurrock Community Partnership.</p>
<p>13. O&amp;S enables the 'voice' of local people and communities across the area to be heard as part of decision and policy-making processes.</p>	<p>Councillors on O&amp;S Committees represent the 'voice' of the local community. Many questions and comments posed by Councillors are done so with the local community in mind, and discussions revolve around how a solution or decision would impact the local community. For example, the PTR O&amp;S Committee raised</p>

	concerns regarding the A13 Widening Scheme and the disruptions this could cause to local residents, to which Officers had given solutions to reduce the impact of the works.
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## Appendix 4 - Comparison of Thurrock's Geographical Neighbour's Scrutiny Processes

Council	No. of Scrutiny Committees	Decision Making Process	Call-in	To Note
Southend	3 – People, Place and Policy & Resources (17 Members on each), meet 6 times a year	Decisions are made at Cabinet, which are then often called-in for debate by scrutiny.	O&S committees monitor the decisions of Cabinet and can call-in decisions made by Cabinet, which have not been implemented. Southend call-in roughly 75% of all reports, rather than undertaking pre-scrutiny.	Every year each committee focus on 1 topic for in-depth study and public inquiry into local concerns, which lead to reports & recommendations.
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham	2 – O&S Committees & a separate Health O&S, which is not politically balanced – also represented on Joint HOSC for Outer North East London	The relevant PFH attends to introduce the report at O&S, and remains to answer questions.	Call-ins are avoided as scrutiny committee's undertake pre-scrutiny.	Each year the scrutiny committee undertake 1 or 2 in-depth reviews which go on to form policy.
Basildon	6 Service Committees and 4 sub-committees	Operating on a Committee System, decisions are made by service committees who also set policies and monitor service performance. There is no Leader or Cabinet in a Committee System.	This is known as a Decision Review, which must be submitted by the fifth working day after the published decision. It is decided within 10 working days by the Staffing and Review Sub-Committee whether the decision will be referred back to the relevant committee for review.	
London Borough of Havering	6 O&S Committees	Decisions made by Cabinet are monitored by	Members are notified of decisions and if calling-in a decision,	Members of the public can request a committee to look into a

	with an O&S Board	O&S and can be called-in following procedures.	it must be submitted within 3 working days. This is then heard at the next O&S Board meeting (if within 15 working days) where it will be decided if the call-in is upheld or declined. Pre-scrutiny is undertaken on a regular basis.	particular topic through submitting a topic request form.
Rochford District Council	1 O&S – the Review Committee (15 Members)	The Review Committee monitors decisions made by Cabinet, Committees or Council and can call-in decisions that are not implemented.	Call-ins must be made within 5 working days of a published decision.	The Review Committee looks into matters of concerns raised by members of the public.

## Appendix 4 - Comparison of Unitary Authorities' Scrutiny Processes

Council	No. of Scrutiny Committees	Decision Making Process	Call-in	To Note
Medway	4 (TF Groups commissioned for in-depth reviews)	Decisions are scrutinised at the 4 O&S Committees before the decision is considered at Cabinet.	Within 5 working days of a published decision unless, it is an urgent decision. If a call-in is accepted, the decision will go back to the relevant O&S for consideration.	Each O&S includes an agenda item on holding a PFH to account on their performance against their portfolio.
Luton	3 and an Overview and Scrutiny Board	Scrutiny or a time-limited T & F can review or scrutinise matters of interest to the local community and make recommendations/comments to inform executive decisions.  Implemented decisions can be reviewed and the O&S or T&F can submit recommendations to the executive or the council.	Called-in decisions must be determined within 20 days of the publication date. A decision cannot be called-in if it has gone through pre-scrutiny.	Some items on O&S work programmes were acquired from their Local Democracy Week consultation with the public.
Bracknell Forest	3 panels, joint health committee and an O&S Commission	The O&S Commission develops the work programme for O&S panels through discussions with the Executive and Corporate Management Team. This includes called-in decisions.	Within 5 working days of a published decision.	
Wokingham	3 and an O&S Management Committee	Decisions to be considered at Cabinet can go through O&S beforehand.	Within 5 working days of a published decision and must be determined within 20 days of publication date.	



<b>10 November 2020</b>	<b>ITEM: 8</b>
<b>Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Financial Update</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key
<b>Report of:</b> Sean Clark, Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Jonathan Wilson, Assistant Director Finance	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sean Clark, Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property	
<b>This report is</b> Public	

## Executive Summary

This report sets out an update on the impact from the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Council's General Fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA), Collection Fund and capital budgets. This builds on the previous reports to the committee and sets out the impact on the projected budget position.

The report also updates on the proposed actions to balance the 2021/22 budget as well as the wider impact on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and the further actions required to bring this back into balance over the next 3 years. As previously noted the Council has a reasonable level of reserves available to support the response and related impact in the current financial year and to contribute to addressing the funding gap in 2021/22.

### 1. Recommendations:

#### 1.1 That the committee comments on the assumptions and financial implications set out in the report.

### 2. Introduction and Background

2.1 This report provides an update on the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and sets out how the financial pressures link to the delivery of key services and support to our communities. Common with the sector as a whole the Council continues to estimate costs in a volatile environment in the context of wider actions taken by both central and local government.

2.2 Further funding has been provided to address Covid-19 impacts in the current year and this, combined with the use of the Members' surplus and reserves, will ensure the budget is delivered in 2020/21.

- 2.3 The key concern remains the wider funding gap over the next 3 years of £34m in the base budget and, specifically, pressures of £19.8m that arise in 2021/22. To date there has been no proposals from central government to increase the base level of funding either through locally raised taxes or through an increase in grant funding.
- 2.4 The information in this report is based on a current assessment of the position but continues to fluctuate based on emerging risks and opportunities.

### **3 Government Support to Local Government, Businesses and Community**

- 3.1 The Government has announced a number of initiatives and support to be delivered through Local Government. These have been set out in previous reports to the Committee.
- 3.2 Since then the following additional support has been made available:
- A further £1bn for support to local government to meet Covid19 financial pressures. This included £0.1bn of specific support for leisure centres that are not operated by local authorities;
  - Covid Enforcement Funding - £0.5bn was made available to authorities based on the tier system announced on 12 October 2020. MHCLG confirmed tier 3 areas would get £8 per head of additional funding for test, trace and contain activity. This reduces to £3 per head in tier 2 areas and £1 per head in tier 1 areas;
  - On 25 September, as part of the Winter Economy Plan, the Chancellor announced £60m of funding for enforcement and compliance including Covid marshals. £30m of this has been provided to local authorities and the balance has been provided to the police. This followed the latest regulations which require councils to enforce the requirements for businesses in respect of Test and Trace;
  - The Adult Social Care Infection Control Fund was first introduced in May 2020 and was initially worth £600 million. It supports adult social care providers to reduce the rate of COVID-19 transmission within and between care settings, in particular by helping to reduce the need for staff movements between sites. The Adult Social Care Infection Control Fund has now been extended until March 2021, with an extra £546 million of funding;
  - Schools Transport - Local transport authorities were provided with £44 million of funding in September to boost transport capacity for dedicated school and college services for the first half of the Autumn term. Further funding of £27.445m has been provided for the second half of the term. This funding is designed to provide additional transport capacity for journeys to school and college;
  - Cultural Recovery Fund - This fund of up to £500m is to provide financial support for cultural organisations that were financially stable before Covid-19 but are now facing significant financial risks; and

- On 12 October, MHCLG announced £10m Cold Weather Fund payments for councils to help support rough sleepers and an additional £2m is available for faith and community groups who work with rough sleepers. No announcement has been made about the distribution of this funding.
- 3.3 Councils continue to submit monthly returns to the MHCLG setting out the financial impact on councils. This is to both monitor how any grant funding is being spent and to understand the impact on budgets across the country. This continues to assist MHCLG in their understanding of the financial impacts arising from the pandemic.

### Business Support

- The Job Support Scheme was announced on 12 October 2020 and then revised on 22 October 2020 and provides support for the reduction in employee hours caused by the pandemic. The scheme now requires the employer contribution to the unworked hours to be 5%, and reduces the minimum hours required from employees to 20% - equal to one day per week.
- The Job Support Scheme Closed for businesses legally required to close remains unchanged. Each employee who cannot work due to these restrictions will receive two thirds of their normal pay, paid by their employer and fully funded by the government, to a maximum of £2,083.33 per month, although their employer has discretion to pay more than this if they wish.
- Employers will receive the £1,000 Job Retention Bonus for each eligible employee that was furloughed and kept continuously employed until 31 January 2021.
- Business grants - The Treasury announced additional funding to support cash grants of up to £2,100 per month primarily for businesses in the hospitality, accommodation and leisure sector who may be adversely impacted by the restrictions in high-alert level areas. These grants will be available retrospectively for areas that have already been subject to restrictions, and come on top of higher levels of additional business support for Local Authorities moving into Tier 3 which, if applied across the country, would total more than £1 billion.
- Self-employment income support grant extension – this applies to those who have been previously eligible for the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme and whose trade is temporarily reduced or stopped. The extension will last for six months, from November 2020 to April 2021 and grants will be paid in two lump sum instalments each covering a three-month period. For the first instalment the Government will provide a taxable grant covering 40% of average monthly trading profits, paid out in a single instalment covering three months' worth of profits and capped at £3,750 in total. The second grant will cover a three-month period from 1 February 2021 until 30 April 2021. The Government will review the level of the second grant and set this in due course.

## **Further Financial Allocations Awarded to Thurrock Council**

3.4 Since the previous report to this committee the following further financial allocations have been made to the Council:

3.5 Direct Revenue Funding to manage the effects of Covid19:

The Council initially received £10.757m from the first three tranches of support and this has now been increased by a fourth tranche of £3.481m to a total of £14.238m.

3.6 The Council has submitted the first claim under the income losses support scheme which covers the first 4 months of 2020/21. There are 2 further claims to make in this financial year.

3.7 Ring-fenced financial allocations to the Council:

Further allocations have been made as set out below. These amounts are ring-fenced for the specific purposes identified and are:

- Enforcement and compliance – The Council has received £0.094m to enforce the requirements of business in respect of test and trace;
- The Council received an initial £1.007m in the initial round of infection control funding. A further £1.2m will be provided in two tranches to support further measures in both residential care settings and for the provision of homecare;
- Schools Transport – the Council has received two tranches of the funding of £0.168m and £0.090m respectively;
- Cultural Recovery Fund – the Council has been awarded £0.191m to address any COVID-19 safety concerns at the Thameside theatre; and
- The Council's allocation from the Cold Weather Fund has yet to be announced.

3.8 Direct support for Business in Thurrock:

The updated position is set out below:

- For the current tax year the Government has extended Business rate relief to all businesses within the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure sector irrespective of rateable value. A total of circa £52m in Business Rates relief has been awarded to over 900 qualifying businesses within Thurrock;
- A cash grant scheme covering all businesses that are in receipt of one of the reliefs above - £10,000 to each business with a rateable value of £15,000 or less and £25,000 for those with a rateable value between £15,000 and £51,000; and

- The discretionary grants scheme aimed at small businesses who did not qualify for the cash grant scheme closed for applications on 28 June 2020 resulting in circa £1.2m being paid out to over 150 qualifying businesses.

#### **4 General Fund Budget Pressures 2020/21**

- 4.1 A summary of the General Fund budget pressures that have currently been experienced and forecast was presented to the previous meeting of the committee and was followed by the quarter 1 position being reported to Cabinet in September 2020. This reflected a forecast overspend of £2.207m to be met from reserves, but since then, further funding has been allocated by government as set out earlier in the report including £3.48m to be applied to ongoing costs and income losses. The forecast will be re-assessed at the end of the second quarter and reported to Cabinet in December 2020.
- 4.2 There remains significant volatility in the projections as infection rates have now started to rise both regionally and nationally. As previously reported there remains concern over the significant financial impacts in the adult social care market, the potential for increases in child protection referrals, significant risk of increased homelessness in the borough and the impact of social distancing on schools' transport. There are also wider impacts on the costs of ongoing capital schemes which remain under review.
- 4.3 Income losses also remain significant and while MHCLG will cover circa 71% of losses in fees and charges it is noted this does not cover income losses associated with either commercial property or wider commercial investments.
- 4.4 Finally, the projected position does not include the unknown impacts for the remainder of the financial year nor does it include the impact on Council Tax and Business Rates which is set out below.
- 4.5 To help manage the overall position, there is currently a freeze on non-essential spend including both capital and revenue projects. The Council expects to deliver the financial position in the current year through a combination of cost containment, funding from central government, use of the Members surplus and the allocation of reserves as required. The Council continues to liaise with colleagues at MHCLG and the wider sector to share issues arising and suggest sustainable solutions.

#### **5 Council Tax and Business Rates**

- 5.1 Council Tax income levels remain under review but indications continue to suggest wider economic impacts will result in losses but the full extent has been deferred by wider central government initiatives which are providing support to the economy and target specifically the retention of jobs.
- 5.2 Business Rates income continues to be protected in the current year by both the funding of reliefs for affected sectors from MHCLG and a safety net mechanism. However there remains concern over collection rates in the year to date and this continues to be reviewed.

- 5.3 The impact from both Council Tax and Business Rates do not impact on the current year financial position (due to the way the system operates). Normally any losses arising would need to be funded in the following financial year but MHCLG have committed to spreading any deficits over the following three years although final confirmation on the workings of the system are still to be confirmed.
- 5.4 The wider concern is the base levels of council tax and business rates will be reduced in 2021/22 that will significantly reduce the overall level of locally raised revenue available to the Council.

## **6 Capital Programme**

- 6.1 The impact of COVID-19 on existing projects continue to be managed to mitigate claims for contract extensions and social distancing on site.
- 6.2 There are now impacts on timelines of some capital schemes and specific costs arising from ensuring sites are compliant with required regulations. The costs associated with this continue to be monitored.
- 6.3 The capital programme remains under review as part of the overall MTFS assessment. Cabinet is considering the prioritisation and affordability of all upcoming projects to ensure they are deliverable within the new budgetary constraints and the limited staffing resources that will be available to deliver them.

## **7 Housing Revenue Account**

- 7.1 The impact on the Housing Revenue Account has been limited to an increase in the debt risk associated with the rental income stream. The wider concern remains that this risk increases as the wider economic impacts of the pandemic develop. There is continued oversight of the level of benefits claims in light of unemployment rises and the impact remains under review.

## **8 Impact on MTFS**

- 8.1 The overall projected financial position over the next three years has deteriorated and there is a funding gap now forecast at £34m. This reduction has arisen from the projected direct impact of COVID-19 and the pause to elements of the Capital Strategy, most notably further capital investments and Thurrock Regeneration Ltd (TRL).
- 8.2 The ongoing impact of COVID-19 has resulted in the following key impacts on the council's budget position:
- Local Funding – the projected decrease in the financial funding from Council Tax and Business Rates equates to lower income estimated at £3.3m. This includes assumptions on the collection fund deficits and increases in the use of the Local Council Tax Scheme from the current year which remain subject to the wider continuing economic impacts of the pandemic;

- Budget surpluses are no longer projected across the life of the MTFS as the costs of the pandemic absorb these to fund essential services. This equates to a deterioration in resources of £5.5m; and
- Additional ongoing costs and loss of income – additional pressures and further income losses total £3.3m.

8.3 As reported in the September 2020 Cabinet report, elements of the capital strategy has been paused for new activity. This lends to a projected impact of circa £12.0m over the life of the MTFS and includes both cash investments and capital investments in TRL - hence the associated targets have been removed pending further consideration.

8.4 The reform of the council's services and approach will continue as planned despite COVID-19, but now at a faster pace than anticipated pre-pandemic. There remains no impacts on existing investments from the pandemic in regards to performance, seven months after lockdown commenced. The council's financial planning is on the basis that the pause (while democratic oversight changes required by this committee have been implemented) is a longstanding position. In addition, savings targets for subsequent years have been removed totalling £2m and revisions to wider projections total £3.4m.

8.5 There remains uncertainty over the wider, longer-term economic impacts of the pandemic and the level of any further financial support available to local authorities from central government. This continues to be monitored and updates to the MTFS will be made to reflect updated assessments of this position.

## **9 Addressing the Funding Gaps**

9.1 Given the position set out above essential action is required. The increase in reserves in recent years has allowed the council some breathing space to address the significant budget challenges. Action taken this year has been required to operate on a lower-cost base that will start to address the severe pressures later in the MTFS.

9.2 In October 2020 Cabinet supported three immediate actions which have a significant impact to begin to address the financial pressures and deliver a balanced budget:

9.2.1 The use of reserves – Cabinet agreed to commit to the use of the non-specific reserves totalling up to £5.5m. This provides resilience against unplanned budget pressures in the future and can be used to meet a budget deficit;

9.2.2 The use of capital receipts. Whilst capital receipts cannot generally be used for revenue expenditure, an exception is the annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). This budget relates to the amounts that must be set aside for the repayment of debt incurred for capital project borrowing. This is currently included in the revenue budget and is in excess of £8m; and

- 9.2.3 Post vacancies. Officers have already put in place a recruitment freeze on non-essential roles and currently have in excess of 200 vacant posts in the organisation. Through restricting recruitment into vacant posts savings can be achieved.
- 9.3 There are further considerations that would impact on the budget pressures and include:
- The level of Revenue Support or other grants for next year. The published aim of the Chancellor was to complete a full Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) that would provide councils with indications of government support for the next three to four years. It has now been confirmed this will be a one-year settlement given that the pandemic has led to significant economic uncertainty; and
  - Council Tax referendum limits. The current limit is 2% and, in line with the normal approach, this is the level increase modelled into the MTFS for the next three years. Any 1% increase equates to approximately £750k and remains a permanent increase to the council's base.
- 9.4 A date for the local government settlement is yet to be announced though, in recent years, these announcements have tended to be the week before Christmas, leaving less time to react and plan.
- 9.5 Without a significant increase in government grant, the initial actions above will not be sufficient to meet the budget gap as currently forecast and officers continue to work with Members on options to achieve this.
- 9.6 It should be noted that any short-term measure, such as the use of reserves and capital receipts, are not sustainable. Whilst such measures push the pressures into the following years, it does allow some time to reform services and reduce the size of the authority, ahead of years where pressures are most severe. However, only permanent impacts on the budget have an ongoing impact and reduce the deficit over the life of the MTFS and this suggested approach affords Members and officers time to bring forward sustainable options, but with pace to meet the upcoming pressures over the life of the MTFS.

## **10 Wider Medium Term Actions**

- 10.1 In addition to the requirement to set a balanced budget in 2021/22, it is clear sustainable changes will be required over the medium term. Cabinet has agreed to support the following actions:
- 10.2 A continuation of the review of the council's assets with two objectives:
- Identify those assets that are not required to realise capital receipts to support the budget through the Retain, Re-use or Release programme; and
  - Assess whether better services can be delivered within fewer buildings.



Both of these objectives reduce revenue expenditure in the operation, maintenance and any future capital needs of buildings.

- 10.3 The transformation programme will continue to identify ways of reducing expenditure through, for example, greater use of digital channels and supporting social care in early intervention.
- 10.4 A review of staffing budgets - the council's largest single budget relates to staff, half of which are in the Adults' and Children's Directorates. All permanent changes that impact on staff and services require considered approaches, formal consultation, impact assessment, mitigation where needed/possible and lead in time to implement.

## **11 Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 11.1 This report sets out the current projected financial impact of COVID-19 and the impact on the delivery of the 2020/21 budget and the wider expected impact on the MTFS. The impact on services remains under consideration to assess the full impact and initial actions to support the delivery of the 2021/22 budget have been agreed by the Cabinet.
- 11.2 Wider actions to support the delivery of the MTFS over three years are under active consideration with regular updates to Cabinet reporting on progress towards this.

## **12 Reasons for Recommendation**

- 12.1 The Council has a statutory requirement to set a balanced budget annually and to review its adequacy of reserves. This report sets out the potential impacts on the delivery of the balanced budget for 2020/21 and the MTFS over the next four years.

## **13 Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 13.1 The budget planning governance structure includes involvement and consultation with officers, Portfolio Holders and Members.

## **14 Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

- 14.1 The initial impact of Covid-19 has impacted on the wider delivery of frontline services and the financial impact remains under consideration to assess how the council delivers both its statutory services and priority areas.
- 14.2 The budgeted surplus for 2020/21 provides further financial resilience to support the Council response to the pandemic.

## **15 Implications**

### **15.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Sean Clark**  
**Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property**

Council officers have a legal responsibility to ensure that the Council can contain spend within its available resources. Regular budget monitoring reports will continue to come to Cabinet and be considered by the Directors' Board and management teams in order to maintain effective controls on expenditure. In the context of the financial impact of Covid-19 austerity measures are being communicated across the Council in order to reduce ancillary spend and to ensure that everyone is aware of the importance and value of every pound of the taxpayers money that is spent by the Council.

The budget report issued in February 2020 set a balanced budget based on the assumptions in place at the time. The Covid-19 pandemic has created a significant shock to the economy and resulted in significant unplanned expenditure and income losses as set out in the report.

The full impact of this is not yet known but the ability of the Council to deliver a balanced budget in 2020/21 remains uncertain. The most significant uncertainty is on the impact of the pandemic on council tax and business rates income going forwards. This combined with the additional costs and local income losses will be significant. The ability to deliver the budget will then depend on the final proposed level of mitigation from central government. The impact is now clearly more significant in 2021/22 as the wider economic picture becomes clearer and any collection fund losses from the current year need to be funded.

The longer term outlook will be influenced by the ongoing review of financing in the sector. This has been deferred to 2021/22 at the earliest so there remains significant uncertainty underpinning the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Council continues to liaise with Government to develop a mutual understanding of the issues to enable appropriate actions to be taken by both.

## **15.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Ian Hunt**  
**Assistant Director Law & Governance, and Monitoring Officer**

There are no specific legal implications set out in the report.

There are statutory requirements of the Council's Section 151 Officer in relation to setting a balanced budget. The Local Government Finance Act 1988 (Section 114) prescribes that the responsible financial officer "must make a report if he considers that a decision has been made or is about to be made involving expenditure which is unlawful or which, if pursued to its conclusion, would be unlawful and likely to cause a loss or deficiency to the authority". This includes an unbalanced budget.

### **15.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**  
**Community Development and Equalities  
Manager**

The Equality Act 2010 places a public duty on authorities to consider the impact of proposals on people with protected characteristics so that positive or negative impacts can be understood and enhanced or mitigated as appropriate. Services will be required to consider the impact on any proposals to reduce service levels through a community equality impact assessment which should seek to involve those directly affected.

### **15.4 Other implications (where significant – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)**

The wider concerns are set out in the report. The major concern is that core services cannot be delivered at the expected level as a consequence of responding to the pandemic.

### **15.5 Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Budget working papers
- MHCLG funding announcements
- Wider sector responses

### **16 Appendices to the report**

None

### **Report Author:**

Sean Clark

Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property

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<b>10 November 2020</b>	<b>ITEM: 9</b>
<b>Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Connectivity and Wi-Fi Improvements</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key
<b>Report of:</b> Sean Clark, Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Andy Best, Strategic Lead IT	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sean Clark, Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property	
<b>This report is</b> Public	

## Executive Summary

This report is to address questions on digital connectivity that came out of the June 2020 Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

As part of the Association of South Essex Local Authorities' (ASELA) evolving digital vision and strategy work is actively progressing on the implementation of improved digital infrastructure across the region with a clear focus to drive up full fibre rollout from the current level in Thurrock of 8% to near on 100%, prior to the government target of 2025. This is being addressed from a number of angles that are set out within the report.

### 1. Recommendations:

#### 1.1 That the committee comments on and notes the report.

### 2. Introduction and Background

#### Public Sector Funding:

- 2.1 The Government Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) programme is providing funding to upgrade public sector sites to Gigabit capable infrastructure. In ASELA this is a £4.4 million investment to provide full fibre connectivity to circa 130 public sector sites including schools, council care homes, libraries and fire stations - circa 80 of these sites are within Thurrock. The sites cover: Basildon, Brentwood, Castlepoint, Rochford and Thurrock. They do not include Southend as Full fibre has already been rolled out there in partnership with City Fibre. The fibre rollout will deliver over 130Km of fibre spine across the region (circa 60km of this within Thurrock), which is expected to encourage commercial investment to provide access to Gigabit capable infrastructure for other business and residential properties in these areas.

- 2.2 In addition to the above, ASELA, have just received approval from the South East Local Economic Partnership (SELEP) for an additional £2.5 million from the MHCLG “Getting Building” fund to expand the current LFFN deployment by circa 120 sites. This funding will enable ASELA to both extend coverage to public sites (GP Surgeries/Care Homes) primarily in rural areas, as well as stimulate further investment from the private sector to accelerate the deployment of Gigabit capable broadband to the surrounding communities.
- 2.3 ASELA are working increasingly closely with the Superfast Essex programme to map coverage and align the public sector investment to ensure it is correctly focussed and best value for money is achieved.
- 2.4 A new government initiative the “Outside in” Programme is focussed on driving improved broadband infrastructure to the most “hard to reach” locations of which there are some within ASELA that could meet this criteria (primarily Rochford and Brentwood). This is primarily an initiative driven and managed by Central Government that defines areas to address. However with ASELA’s raised profile and close engagement with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) it is believed that ASELA will have a significant influence on this programme especially as we could provide DCMS with mapping data and from this evidence make a case for investment in certain areas.
- 2.5 Within Thurrock support is increasingly being provided to community forums who are striving to improve broadband connectivity in their area. In some cases this has involved direct grants and / or advice and guidance. This is proving increasingly beneficial with the engagement that ASELA has built up with the private sector providers.
- 2.6 A key part of the LFFN Programme is to drive forward “Barrier Busting” and “Market Engagement” workstreams to leverage private sector investment in digital infrastructure off the back of the public sector investment. Now that the “Rollout” has started these workstreams will be ramped up. Business parks and residential developments have been mapped, with interconnection points to the fibre spines aligned to this mapping. GP Surgeries and Care Homes have also been mapped and with Government focus on improving connectivity these will be prioritised. This has led to an increasing engagement with the NHS (Local Trust and CCG’s) and Fire and Rescue across the region.

### **Engagement with Commercial Connectivity Providers**

- 2.7 The majority of the enhanced digital fibre infrastructure is expected to be provided via commercially funded investment programmes from the likes of Openreach, City Fibre Virgin Media and other smaller providers known as Alternative Network Providers (Alnets). ASELA are already actively involved in engaging with the market and promoting ASELA as a place that encourages investment through partnership and the removing of barriers to investment. The LFFN programme has significantly raised ASELA’s profile within government and has directly enabled and led to greater engagement and interest from private sector investment.

- 2.8 Openreach has already made a series of announcements regarding their investment to a Fibre to the Premises solution including Brentwood, Billericay and Rochford. In September 2020 Openreach announced full fibre investments for Thurrock in Grays and Purfleet which should be completed within the next 18 months. This should mean 26,000 residential and business addresses should have access to a full fibre capability. It is worth pointing out that the level of this announced investment is significantly greater across ASELA than the wider South East region.
- 2.9 Virgin Media intends upgrading large parts of its existing infrastructure to become Gigabit capable.
- 2.10 Hyperoptic have continued to make investments in social housing within Thurrock.

### **Wi-Fi**

- 2.11 The market is changing in respect of Public Wi-Fi as increasingly the requirement and business model for open space public Wi-Fi is disappearing. That is because of the much wider 4G coverage availability and the fact that a large and increasing percentage of the population have smart phones with inclusive 4G data packages. Hence the value of duplicating this with open space public Wi-Fi will increasingly be negligible. It is a different situation in respect of internal Wi-Fi where there is still a high demand for this due to less “good” 4G coverage and more prolonged use of data by users. In these situations users expect higher performance / throughput and may be concerned about going outside of their mobile data bundle limits. Typically internal Wi-Fi is provided by the organisation working from that site and will advertise this as a selling point to customers. However viability of charging for the Wi-Fi is rapidly disappearing, indeed most if not all such Wi-Fi is now offered as a free and increasingly expected service by customers.
- 2.12 Essentially the requirement is for “mobile Data” to be available universally whether it be 4G / 5G or Wi-Fi. The common element for “good mobile data” coverage is full fibre connectivity whether it be as the fibre backhaul to the mobile operators or full fibre connection into sites that are providing Wi-Fi to users.
- 2.13 As part of the LFFN Programme “Market Engagement” workstream relationships are being built with the mobile operators to understand and influence their rollout plans around 4G / 5G and to provide input to them on the additional capability of backhaul fibre that will be rolled out as a result of the public sector investments.
- 2.14 “Market Engagement” will also involve building those relationships with the connectivity providers to leverage the LFFN fibre making it a cost effective investment for full fibre rollout to the local area and those sites that want to offer “good Wi-Fi” coverage or enable improved mobile coverage to their customers.

## **Timescales**

2.15 To provide a best view of timescales:

- The current LFFN programme is targeted to complete rollout by May 2021;
- Additional sites from additional funding to be rolled out by March 2022;
- Openreach announced fibre deployments to rollout within the next 18 months;
- Ongoing improvements and upgrades taking place to 4G coverage;
- 5G coverage to be focused on urban areas such as Grays, Basildon etc. Rural areas unlikely to be fully addressed with 5G within the next 2 to 3 years. Rural areas however will benefit from 4G upgrades (which will generally meet needs);
- Engagement with other connectivity providers to start practical rollout to homes / businesses off the back of LFFN by the summer of next year;
- Superfast Essex rollout complete by Dec 2021; and
- Outside In for ASELA benefit next 18 months through to 2025.

## **3 Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

3.1 There are no options as this report is for information.

## **4 Reasons for Recommendation**

4.1 The committee asked for an update on Connectivity and Wi-Fi Improvements.

## **5 Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

5.1 There has been no consultation as this is a for information report.

## **6 Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

6.1 Connectivity contributes towards the council's digital ambitions.

## **7 Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Sean Clark**  
**Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property**

There are no financial implications as a result of this report.

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Ian Hunt**  
**Assistant Director Law & Governance, and Monitoring Officer**

There are no specific legal implications set out in the report.



### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**  
**Community Development and Equalities  
Manager**

There are no diversity implications as a result of this report.

### **7.4 Other implications (where significant – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)**

Not applicable.

### **7.5 Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):**

None

## **8 Appendices to the report**

None

### **Report Author:**

Sean Clark

Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property

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<b>10 November 2020</b>	<b>ITEM: 10</b>
<b>Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Mid-Year / Quarter 2 (April to September 2020) Corporate Performance Report 2020/21</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-key
<b>Report of:</b> Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Communications & Customer Services	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> n/a	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Communications & Customer Services	
<b>This report is public</b>	

## Executive Summary

This is the mid-year corporate performance monitoring report for 2020/21 covering April to September 2020.

This report provides a progress update in relation to the performance of those KPIs, including a focus on some specific highlights and challenges. It details the statistical evidence the council will use to monitor the progress and performance against the council's priorities.

At this unique and unprecedented time, this report shows that three quarters of indicators are currently achieving target and 55% are better than or the same as the previous year. Many indicators have been directly or indirectly impacted by the coronavirus pandemic and the enforced changes to council services in line with government guidance during this period. The report also highlights how Covid-19 has disrupted or changed performance and/or priorities and demand levels across a number of services.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **To note and comment upon the performance of the key corporate performance indicators in particular those areas which are off target and the impact of Covid-19.**
- 1.2 **To identify any areas which require additional consideration.**

## 2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1. The performance of the priority activities of the council is monitored through the Corporate Key Performance Indicator (KPI) framework. This provides a mixture of strategic and operational indicators.
- 2.2. The indicators have been chosen to be as clear and simple to understand as possible, whilst balancing the need to ensure the council is monitoring those things which are of most importance, both operationally and strategically.
- 2.3. This reflects the demand for council services increasing and being ever more complex, not least due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, and the need for a holistic approach to monitoring data and intelligence. Analysis of performance and internal processes at service level by Directors continued monthly throughout 2019/20 and will continue throughout 2020/21.
- 2.4. These indicators will continue to be reported to both Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet on a quarterly basis, throughout 2020/21.
- 2.5. In line with the recommendation from Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2019, throughout 2020/21, where performance is below target, commentary will be included to show the intended improvement plan. This is included in Section 3.6 as the “Route to Green”.

## 3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

This report is a monitoring report, therefore there is no options analysis.

### 3.1 Summary of Corporate KPI Performance

Quarter 2 2020/21 Performance against target		Direction of Travel compared to 2019/20	
<b>Achieved</b>	76.7% (23)	<b>↑ BETTER</b>	34.5% (10)
<b>Failed</b>	23.3% (7)	<b>→ STATIC</b>	20.7% (6)
		<b>↓ WORSE</b>	44.8% (13)

### 3.2 Impact of Covid-19

- 3.2.1 The Quarter 2 (April to September 2020) overall outturn of 76.7% is back in line with the 74% overall percentage of KPIs achieving target at the end of 2019/20. Most indicators are now being able to be reported, however there are several indicators where the profiling for the quarterly targets for the first part of this year have been adjusted, in the hope that performance in the second half of the

year can mitigate any reduced service level rates earlier, as a result of the impact of Covid-19 earlier in the year.

- 3.2.2 Several indicators, however, continue to be affected by Covid-19. The narrative in section 3.6 highlights where performance has been affected during the first 6 months of 2020/21 in both the height of the 'lockdown' and subsequent restrictions or changes to service demand or delivery.
- 3.2.3 In some cases data is still not available either because the data is not currently being recorded due to other priorities e.g. for Public Health or because that service/activity is not currently operating in line with government guidance. This is summarised in section 3.7.
- 3.2.4 In most cases the targets for 2020/21 have been set based on "normal" circumstances. This is likely to mean that more indicators will not "perform" as well as they did in 2019/20, and/or the rate of improvement will not be as great. The decision to keep most targets comparable with last year is to more clearly analyse the impact of the disruption caused by the pandemic. Where an indicator has failed to reach its target during the year, the commentary provided will identify clearly whether this is related to Covid-19 impacts.
- 3.2.5 It is impossible to predict accurately how long and to what extent service delivery in some areas will continue to be impacted. This will be kept under close monitoring and in some cases, targets for 2020/21 will need to be reviewed.
- 3.2.6 Any targets for health and social care indicators which are part of the Better Care Fund are yet to be confirmed as these conversations with NHS partners and the Department of Health have been delayed due to Covid-19 priorities.

### 3.3 On target performance

Three quarters of available corporate KPIs achieved their targets.

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2019/20 Outturn	Quarter 1	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2 (YTD)	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2019/20	Quarter 1 Target	2020/21 Target
Permanent admissions of older people (aged 65+) to residential and nursing care homes per 100,000 population	Cllr Halden	739.7 per 100,000	87.3 (21)	162.1 (39)	203.6 (49)	261.8 (63)	261.8 (63)	ACHIEVED	BETTER	374.0 (90) (prov)	739.7 (178) (prov)
Number of applicants with family commitments in Bed & Breakfast for six weeks or more (ie those presenting as homeless who have dependent child(ren) or are pregnant)	Cllr Johnson	3	0	0	0	0	0	ACHIEVED	BETTER	0	0
% of repairs completed within target	Cllr Johnson	98.3%	99.5%	99.2%	98.7%	98.4%	99.1%	ACHIEVED	BETTER	95%	95%
% of potholes repaired within policy and agreed timeframe	Cllr Maney	99.33%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	ACHIEVED	BETTER	98%	98%
% occupancy of council-owned business centres	Cllr Coxshall	91%	90%				93%	ACHIEVED	BETTER	80%	80%
Proportion of older people (65+) still at home 91 days after discharge from hospital into reablement/ rehabilitation	Cllr Halden	87.40%	93.1%				89.6%	ACHIEVED	BETTER	86.3% (prov)	86.3% (prov)
No of placements available within council for volunteers	Cllr Huelin	225	205				230	ACHIEVED	BETTER	230	210
% of young people who reoffend after a previously recorded offence	Cllr Halden	11.0%	13% (Q4)				3% (Q1) quarter in arrears	ACHIEVED	BETTER	13%	13%
% Initial Health Assessment (IHA) completed within 28 days (20 working days) of child becoming Looked After	Cllr Halden	69.2%	66.7%				85.7%	ACHIEVED	BETTER	80%	80%

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2019/20 Outturn	Quarter 1	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2 (YTD)	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2019/20	Quarter 1 Target	2020/21 Target
% of Minor planning applications processed in 8 weeks	Cllr Coxshall	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	ACHIEVED	IN LINE	90%	90%
Overall spend to budget on HRA (£K variance)	Cllr Johnson	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	ACHIEVED	IN LINE	£0	£0
% Rent collected	Cllr Johnson	98.5%	88.9%	89.4%	91.9%	93.4%	93.4%	ACHIEVED	IN LINE	92%	98%
% of primary schools judged "good" or better	Cllr Jefferies	92.0%	92.3%				92.3%	ACHIEVED	IN LINE	426 days	92% (prov)
% of secondary schools judged "good" or better	Cllr Jefferies	<i>new KPI</i>	63.0%				63.0%	ACHIEVED	IN LINE	426 days	63% (prov)
Proportion of people using social care who receive direct payments	Cllr Halden	35.4%	36.6%	36.4%	37.2%	34.7%	34.7%	ACHIEVED	WORSE	34%	34%
% of Major planning applications processed in 13 weeks	Cllr Coxshall	100%	89%	100%	100%	100%	94%	ACHIEVED	WORSE	90%	90%
Tenant satisfaction with Transforming Homes	Cllr Johnson	86.9%	83.3%	100%	85.7%	81.3%	85.3%	ACHIEVED	WORSE	85%	85%
Number of new Micro Enterprises started since 1 April 2020	Cllr Huelin	44	5				10	ACHIEVED	WORSE	0	20
% of volunteer placements filled within council	Cllr Huelin	96%	100%				92%	ACHIEVED	WORSE	92%	96%
Successful completion of treatment in Young People's Drug & Alcohol service (YTD)	Cllr Mayes	88%	78%				80%	ACHIEVED	WORSE	70%	70%
Value (£) of council owned property disposals	Cllr Coxshall	£470k	£350k				£350k	ACHIEVED	WORSE	No target	No target
% occupancy of commercial properties	Cllr Coxshall	92%	88%				88%	ACHIEVED	WORSE	88%	88%
Number of events and activities that support engagement in a range of cultural, social and learning opportunities to support well-being and strengthen community connections (total sessions provided in quarter)	Cllr Huelin	<i>new KPI</i>	0				104	ACHIEVED	N/A	100	300

### 3.4 In focus highlight for Quarter 2

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2019/20 Outturn	Quarter 1	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2 (YTD)	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2019/20	Quarter 2 Target	2020/21 Target
% Rent collected	Cllr Johnson	98.5%	88.9%	89.4%	91.9%	93.4%	93.4%	ACHIEVED	IN LINE	92%	98%

The Rents Team have surpassed their profiled target for rent collection of 92% collecting 93.35% of rent due at the end of September as well as supporting a large number of tenants through financial inclusion.

This is despite, the Coronavirus pandemic resulting in some significant challenges for the Rents Team in 2020/21. The Rents team have had to make all contact with tenants by telephone and letter as home visits have been suspended.

So far in 2020/21 there has been a 21% increase in tenants claiming Universal Credit from 2317 at the end of March to 2812 at the end of September with rent arrears for tenants claiming Universal Credit increasing by a margin of 52% over the same period. There has also been a 10.21% reduction in income from Housing benefit on the same period last year.

Financial Inclusion Officers' work has also been adversely affected due to the pandemic and have only been able to support tenants over the telephone as all outreach work in hubs, libraries and children's centres have been suspended due to closure. Over the first three months of the pandemic, Financial Inclusion Officers were mainly carrying out welfare calls offering advice to new Universal Credit claimants as well as tenants who were furloughed and experiencing financial hardship due to the pandemic. They also contacted tenants who were in rent arrears offering debt advice.

At the end of September, Financial Inclusion Officers have supported a total of 668 tenants, an increase of 54% on the same period last year, and have generated additional income of £174,967 which represents an increase of 35% on the same period last year.

Financial Inclusion Officers look to maximise tenants' income by advising and assisting tenants with any claims they are eligible for such as PIP, Council Tax support, Discretionary Housing Payments and any other grants they may be eligible for. They also offer food vouchers and assist with clothing, furniture and white goods.



Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2019/20 Outturn	Quarter 1	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2 (YTD)	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2019/20	Quarter 2 Target	2020/21 Target
Number of events and activities that support engagement in a range of cultural, social and learning opportunities to support well-being and strengthen community connections (total sessions provided in quarter)	Cllr Huelin	<i>n/a – new KPI</i>	0				104	ACHIEVED	<i>n/a - new KPI</i>	100	300
<p>Before Covid-19, this indicator was targeted for 600 events (150 per quarter) by year end. With the temporary closure of libraries and community hubs during the Covid restrictions, all face to face events and activities were and continue to be suspended. On that basis, earlier in the year it was agreed to profile the first two quarters at 0 and reduce the targets for quarters 3 and 4 provisionally to 100 events but keep this under review as the degree of the impact of the restrictions was clearer.</p> <p>However, the service has been successful in delivering a diverse programme of virtual events in the last few months. In total since June they have delivered 104 virtual community engagement sessions including online job club, powerpoint and excel training, under-fives story and rhyme sessions, and book promotions.</p> <p>On that basis, the service have increased the target again to 300 events by year end. This is less than the pre-Covid target but is a significantly improved digital offer, which in the absence of any face to face events being able to be delivered, is a much needed and welcomed resource for residents.</p>											

### 3.5 Off target indicators

At the end of quarter 2, 7 of the available indicators failed to meet their target.

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2019/20 Outturn	Quarter 1	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2 YTD	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2019/20	Quarter 2 Target	2020/21 Target
% Household waste reused/ recycled/ composted	Cllr Watkins	33.23%	31.80%	33.73%	33.90%	33.94%	33.86%	FAILED	BETTER	44.37 (46.05% YTD)	41%
<p>This indicator is running below target. Some core contributors to the lower than expected recycling rate include the closure of the Household Waste and Recycling Centre for a period of time at the beginning of the year due to COVID restrictions. The site has a significant impact on recycling levels. In order to ensure that core residual waste collections were maintained during lockdown, the garden waste collections were suspended for a period and then re-introduced on a monthly then fortnightly basis. At this time of the year, garden waste makes up a sizeable proportion of the recycling tonnage. The disruption to collections has impacted performance significantly. With the impact being as great as it was, this indicator is likely to continue below target for the remainder of this year.</p>											
<b>Route to GREEN</b>											
<p>A revised Waste Strategy has been reviewed by the Cleaner and Greener Overview and Scrutiny Committee and is due to be considered by Cabinet. This outlines proposals from the Waste Cross Party Working Group for actions that could be taken that will positively impact recycling levels in the borough. The proposed timeframe for implementation is around 12 to 18 months.</p>											

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2019/20 Outturn	Quarter 1	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2019/20	Quarter 2 Target	2020/21 Target
% General tenant satisfaction with neighbourhoods/services provided by Housing	Cllr Johnson	74.9%	75.5%	70.9%	78.5%	68.7%	74.1%	FAILED	IN LINE	75%	75%
<p>So far in 2020/21, 984 tenants have completed a telephone satisfaction survey which represents around 10% of all tenants. Whilst 74.1% of tenants have said they were satisfied with the service they receive, 12% of tenants gave a neutral rating and 13.9% of tenants said they were dissatisfied with the service they received.</p> <p>Analysis of tenants' responses to all of the perception measures in the wider satisfaction survey demonstrates that the most prevalent drivers of dissatisfaction with the overall Housing service in 2020/21 are: listening to tenant's views, understanding tenants needs and the ease of dealing with Housing.</p>											
<b>Route to GREEN</b>											
<p>Listening to tenant's views and understanding tenant's needs was already identified as a clear priority for 2020/21 for which a new tenant satisfaction telephone survey has been implemented with specific questions on these subjects as well as a wide ranging postal satisfaction survey which was sent to all tenants. This allows the service to collect data on a much larger number of questions than the telephone satisfaction survey currently allows. This will result in broader insight through analysis, will demonstrate the Housing service's willingness to listen to tenant's views and will allow the Housing team to build a far better understanding of tenant's needs.</p> <p>In addition to this the service have also begun measuring customer effort across a number of our transactional satisfaction surveys with more planned for later in the year. This aims to measure how easy it was for the tenant to deal with us at each particular touchpoint or transaction, for example getting a repair completed, having a boiler serviced or an interaction with a Tenancy Management Officer. The feedback collected from tenants as part of this will allow us to identify particular processes or touchpoints where tenants find interacting with Housing difficult in order to make improvements to make the service easier to use.</p>											

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2019/20 Outturn	Quarter 1	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2019/20	Quarter 2 Target	2020/21 Target
Average time to turnaround/re-let voids (in days)	Cllr Johnson	25.6 days	61.17 days	72.70	39.50	47.80	54.40	FAILED	WORSE	28	28

Due to the impact of COVID-19, choice based lettings were suspended for a period of time earlier in the year which meant the properties which were void during that period of suspension remained void for a much longer period of time than usual with only a small number of lettings through direct offers taking place in May. As these affected voids are let, re-let times will be much higher than usual.

#### Route to GREEN

When all affected voids have been let, average re-let times are expected to return to usual levels and we have seen evidence of this already. Void re-let time performance is now beginning to recover and properties which became void after choice based lettings were re-instated are now being let within usual timescales with average re-let times for properties which became void in June and July only marginally worse than target and August and September were better than target.

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2019/20 Outturn	Quarter 1	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2019/20	Quarter 2 Target	2020/21 Target
Number of health hazards removed as a direct result of private sector housing team intervention	Cllr Johnson	1,000	8	86	72	46	212	FAILED	WORSE	500	1000

Non-urgent property inspections and re-inspections ceased during the pandemic following government guidelines therefore numbers of category 1 and 2 health and safety hazards in dwellings that were identified were very small during Quarter 1. This has picked up in Quarter 2.

#### Route to GREEN

Easing of government restrictions allowed Environmental Health and Licensing Officers to carry out HHSRS inspections in August 2020 to remove hazards following the completion and agreement of appropriate risk assessments with Public Health and Health and Safety. Non-urgent property inspections took place in September and are scheduled throughout October, subject to no further changes in government guidelines.

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2019/20 Outturn	Quarter 1	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2019/20	Quarter 2 Target	2020/21 Target
No of new apprenticeships started (inc. staff undertaking apprenticeship)(exc. LA maintained schools)	Cllr Huelin	69	2	0	3	6	11	FAILED	WORSE	12	61
<p>This indicator missed the target by just one person. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, the council was unable to hold the usual apprenticeship recruitment events and this has had a huge impact on recruitment numbers thus far this year.</p>											
<b>Route to GREEN</b>											
<p>The council has an online event planned for 5 November. This has been advertised internally and externally including on the council's website to ensure the number of apprentices the council provides increases.</p>											

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2019/20 Outturn	Quarter 1	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2019/20	Quarter 2 Target	2020/21 Target
Payment rate of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs)	Cllr Gledhill	55.97%	52.19%	51.09%	47.31%	53.00%	50.52%	FAILED	WORSE	70%	70%
<p>There has been a considerable increase in representation and appeals received linked to FPNs issued during the Covid-19 pandemic. Many recipients are claiming to either be on furlough or out of work and in financial difficulty, therefore unable to pay. The council has offered a number of extension periods to individuals to give them the opportunity to pay and avoid prosecution action. Many have taken the offer and paid, some several months later. This has resulted in a lag in payments and impacted this indicator.</p>											
<b>Route to GREEN</b>											
<p>Further visits to recipients of FPNs who have not paid are planned in order to offer the payment extension opportunities and subsequently increase payments. However, this type of fixed penalty notice is a criminal offence. People have the right not to make payment and instead choose to go through the court process. A large number of the FPNs have remained unpaid and this has resulted in an increase in court files. Therefore the decrease in the FPN payment will be reflected in the increase in prosecution files.</p>											

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2019/20 Outturn	Quarter 1	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2019/20	Quarter 2 Target	2020/21 Target
% of refuse bins emptied on correct day	Cllr Watkins	98.91%	97.01%	72.89%	98.23%	97.31%	95.27%	FAILED	WORSE	98.5%	98.5%
<p>August and September, have showed a significant improvement, just below the in-month targets, but rates of collection earlier in the year have meant that the year to date figure is below target.</p> <p>One of the impacts of the lockdown was a delay in the Waste Service being able to recruit and induct collection staff, whilst ensuring that all were able to work safely. The impact of resource availability was managed through adjustments to the frequency of garden waste collections and the collection target was met for the first two months of the year. In June and July however, annual leave and delays in recruitment resulted in some rounds not being collected on schedule although weekend work was undertaken to reduce the impact on residents.</p> <p>With more people working from home, even now that the strict lockdown measures that were experienced from March are no longer in place, the service has seen a significant increase in tonnages being collected. With the recycling stream this has resulted in some capacity issues. As the tipping point is some distance from Thurrock, the trucks can only hold one load a day. When the trucks are full and there are still roads to be collected, there is not capacity in the service to collect those as recycling, therefore, currently, those properties have to be prioritised for collection the following day. This is having an on-going impact on the collection figures.</p>											
<b>Route to GREEN</b>											
<p>The recruitment and induction of agency staff has helped ease the situation, however collection rates will take some time to resume to normal service. The structured fortnightly collection cycle for garden waste has also contributed to the significantly improved performance in August and September and the service anticipates rates to increase going forward.</p> <p>A project is underway to review and rebalance the recycling collection rounds ensuring they are achievable by collection crews. Additionally as the seasons change, capacity from the garden waste stream can be re-allocated to support recycling collections.</p>											

### 3.6 Other key indicators

Throughout the year the council also monitors some other indicators as part of the corporate scorecard which, whilst not performance related, are important to keep under review.

Demand Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2019/20 Outturn	Qtr 1	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Qtr 2	Direction of Travel since 2019/20
Number of households at risk of homelessness approaching the Council for assistance	Cllr Johnson	1,934	348	168	147	181	844	LOWER
No of homeless cases accepted	Cllr Johnson	107	72	11	15	13	111	HIGHER

The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017 places a duty on local authorities to prevent homelessness, or relieve homelessness where this is not possible. The number of approaches include all who have approached the council for housing assistance. A number of these cases were prevented and homelessness has been relieved.

The service prevents homelessness by negotiating with landlords and excluders\* to keep the applicants in the property they are approaching us from. Conversely, we could find them alternative accommodation before they become homeless, thereby preventing their homelessness.

The acceptances are low in comparison to approaches because the service deal with a greater number of the cases before we reach the “main duty” stage, which is the stage at which we make a formal homelessness decision as is traditionally known. This is the stage at which acceptances are recorded.

\*An excluder is someone the applicant currently lives with, eg a parent, friend or resident landlord who has asked the applicant to leave their property.

#### Performance indicators for which data is not currently available due to Covid-19 disruption

Number of delayed transfers of care (DTOC) - days from hospital (attrib. to NHS, ASC & Joint)	The collection and publication of official DToC figures have been suspended for the rest of the year by NHS England.
Number of GP practices with automated screening protocol in place for depression and anxiety amongst LTC (long-term conditions) patients	Data not currently available from GP practices
Average time (in days) for a child to be adopted (3 year average) (ie time between entering care and moving in with adoptive family)	Due to Covid-19 disruption, Q2 return is delayed.
Forecast Council Tax collected	Covid-19 impact is ongoing and is still being assessed. This is being regularly reported to

Forecast National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) collected	members alongside separate financial reporting.
Contact Centre - Face to Face average waiting times (minutes)	Face to Face has not been operating since 23 March due to Covid-19 lockdown.
Contact Centre - Face to Face - no of visitors	

\*Overall spend to budget on General Fund (% variance against forecast) and Total gross external income (fees & charges) (based on sales forecast) will be reported to Cabinet as part of the separate financial reporting in December.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 The corporate priorities and associated performance framework are fundamental to articulating what the council is aiming to achieve. It is best practice to report on the performance of the council. It shows effective levels of governance and transparency and showcases strong performance as well as an acknowledgement of where we need to improve.
- 4.2 This report highlights what the council will focus on during 2020/21 and confirms the governance and monitoring mechanisms which were in place to ensure that priorities are delivered.

#### **5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 5.1 Performance against the corporate priorities was monitored through Performance Board, a cross-council officer group of performance experts representing each service. Performance Board will continue to consider the corporate KPIs on a monthly basis, highlighting areas of particular focus to Directors Board.
- 5.2 Each quarter a report will continue to be presented to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and finally reported to Cabinet.

#### **6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

- 6.1 The vision and priorities cascade into every bit of the council and further to our partners, through key strategies, service plans, team plans and individual objectives.
- 6.2 This report will help decision makers and other interested parties, form a view of the success of the council's actions in working towards achieving the vision and priority ambitions.



## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Jo Freeman**  
**Finance Manager**

The report provides an update on performance against corporate priorities. There are financial KPIs within the corporate scorecard, the performance of which are included in the report.

Where there are issues of underperformance, any recovery planning commissioned by the council may entail future financial implications, and will need to be considered as appropriate.

The council is still assessing the full financial impact of Covid-19 and this is being regularly reported to members.

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**  
**Deputy Head of Law and Deputy Monitoring Officer**

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. However, where there are issues of underperformance, any recovery planning commissioned by the council or associated individual priority projects may have legal implications, and as such will need to be addressed separately as decisions relating to those specific activities are considered.

### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**  
**Team Leader – Community Development and Equalities**

The Corporate Performance Framework for 2020/21 contains measures that help determine the level of progress with meeting wider diversity and equality ambitions, including youth employment and attainment, independent living, vulnerable adults, volunteering etc. Individual commentary is given throughout the year within the regular monitoring reports regarding progress and actions.

### **7.4 Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

The Corporate Performance Framework includes areas which affect a wide variety of issues, including those noted above in the body of the report. Where applicable these are covered in the appendix.

- 8. Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

N/A

- 9. Appendices to the report**

None

**Report Author:**

Sarah Welton

Strategy Manager

## Work Programme

**Committee:** Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Year:** 2020/21

**Dates of Meetings:** 9 June 2020, 8 September 2020, 10 November 2020, 12 January 2021, 9 March 2021

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
<b>9 June 2020</b>		
COVID19 – Financial and Budget Implications	Sean Clark	Member
Impact of COVID-19 on the Current Agile Working Programme	Jackie Hinchliffe	Member
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>8 September 2020</b>		
Financial Update	Sean Clark	Member
Quarter 1 (April to June 2020) Corporate Performance Report 2020/21 and End of Year Corporate Performance Summary 2019/20	Sarah Welton/Karen Wheeler	Officer
Local Council Tax Scheme	Jonathan Wilson/Sean Clark	Member
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>10 November 2020</b>		
Collaborative Communities Framework: 2021-2025	Natalie Smith	Member
Community Forums	Natalie Smith	Member

## Work Programme

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Lead Officer</b>	<b>Requested by Officer/Member</b>
Overview and Scrutiny at Thurrock: A Review	Lucy Tricker/Matthew Boulter	Officer
Financial Update	Sean Clark/ Jonathan Wilson	Member
Mid-Year/Quarter 2 (April-September 2020) Corporate Performance Report 2020/21	Sarah Welton/Karen Wheeler	Officer
Connectivity & Wi-Fi Improvements	Sean Clark	Member
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>12 January 2021</b>		
Communications Strategy Verbal Update (?)	Karen Wheeler	Member
Local Council Tax Scheme	Jonathan Wilson/Sean Clark	Member
Draft General Fund Budget & MTFs Update	Jonathan Wilson/Sean Clark	Officer
Capital Strategy 2021/22	Jonathan Wilson/Sean Clark	Officer
Capital Programme 2021/22	Jonathan Wilson/ Sean Clark	Officer
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>9 March 2021</b>		
Communications Strategy Update	Karen Wheeler	Member

## Work Programme

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
Quarter 3 Corporate Performance Report	Sarah Welton/Karen Wheeler	Officer
Work Programme	Work Programme	Work Programme

### Next Municipal Year:

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**Clerk:** Lucy Tricker

**Updated:** 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020

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